

Series: BELONG, BELIEVE, BECOME - January 21, 2007

**TURNING JESUS LOOSE!
Mark 5**

I. INTRO

- A. Believe it or not, we have a matching couch and chair in our living room that are over **50 years old!** My grandparents bought them new back in about 1951. We inherited them when my Grandmother sold her house in 1986. My grandfather sat in **that** spot from the time I can first remember. When he retired from U.S. Steel at the age of 64, he sat there for the next 14 years until he died. -I was very close to my Grandfather—but I was totally unaware of any spiritual interest whatsoever. So, in my early 20s, I wrote to him and asked him about it. After my second letter, he wrote back and told me that he had once been very involved in a church, but got disillusioned, walked away, and never went back. Then he wrote these words: “Every night I kneel by my bed and ask God to forgive me, and I believe he does.”
- B. I’m willing to bet there are a lot of people like my Grandpap, Clifton Kelly. In the privacy of their hearts, they **believe**. But they’ve been turned off, so they don’t **want** to belong anywhere. I think of what he missed; accountability; the warmth of other travelers; the sense that he was part of something **way** bigger than himself. -But I am especially sad about the **become** part. He was a smart, gifted, talented man. And he worked—and made a **good** living—and **SAT!** Left this big indentation in the couch. -And God calls **us** to **become!** Become the persons we were created to become. And that’s my prayer for you—and me!

II. LOOK LIKE...LIVE LIKE...LOVE LIKE JESUS

- A. Let’s do a little word association here. I’m going to say a word, and I want you to either write down or mentally record the first word that comes to your mind. The word is: **RELIGION**. Okay, how many of you would say that the word that came to your mind was **positive**. How many of you would say that the word was **negative**? What **was** the word that came to mind?
1. There are a lot of people in our world who are under the impression that Jesus came, lived, taught and died to establish a new religion that would be named after him; a new religion that, along with others, would compete for followers, money, and attention. And nothing could be **further** from the truth. In fact, it could be quite accurately said that Jesus came to kill religion. -Jesus was **not** the friend of religion. His sharpest words were aimed at the religious professionals—who paid him back by having Him nailed to a cross. See, the very people who claimed to speak for God had turned Him into a colossal burden. And the whole system they created based on rules, ritual, knowledge and pomp created more pride and smugness than it did love, generosity, kindness and compassion.
 2. Let me take it a step further. Overall, **religion** has done more damage in the world than good. The religious imitation of **true** Christianity that thrived in the Crusades and Inquisitions is among the top offenders. The records of what was done in the name of Jesus in that time period are absolutely **sickening**.

-At this point, it bore no resemblance either to Jesus or what he taught. In fact, there is not a single thing Jesus said that could justify that kind of hatred and slaughter. That kind of stuff comes from the pit of hell—**not** from God.

3. See, loving, following, and worshiping God—and doing His work in this world was **never** intended to become a system of knowledge and rules and performance. Bono from the band U2 makes a profound observation:

I often wonder if religion is the enemy of God. It's almost like religion is what happens when the Spirit has left the building.

4. Now, this is the main point I want to make. On the issue of **belonging**, religion doesn't do too bad—**if** you're on the inside. Think of what al Qaeda has been able to pull off using the sense of belonging with **cells**—fueled by hatred for a common enemy. And people **believe!** Jim Jones followers believed in him—to the point of death. So do Osama Bin Laden's followers. The question is—what do they **become?**

- B. I can't resolve the issue of religion vs. God this morning. But I do want to say, our goal, our **mission** at The Olive Branch is **not** to get people to sign up for Christianity. It's to get people—whatever religion they're from, even if it's Christianity to come to God through Jesus, and then look like Jesus, live like Jesus and love like Jesus. That's what it means to become a fully devoted follower of Christ.

-So, the question becomes, what did Jesus **look** like? How did Jesus **live?** And how did He **love?** To at least partially answer those questions, I want to look for a few minutes at a very interesting incident from Jesus' life. It's found in Mark 5, and I'm deeply indebted to John Ortberg for some of these insights.

1. If you start reading in Mark 4, Jesus ministry had been drawing standing room only crowds—so big that had to give his message from a boat. **I** could get into that! Right in the middle of this success, Jesus drops a bombshell on his disciples:

-That day when evening came, he said to his disciples, "Let us go over to the other side (Mark 4:35 TNIV)."

-The "other side of the lake" wasn't just an issue of geography. It would be more like the "wrong side of the tracks"—only a thousand times worse. It was called the **Decapolis**—or "ten cities." Not only was it filled with pagan temples and cults that glorified sex, violence and money, it was a center for Roman power—with a whole legion—6000 soldiers—stationed there.

-I can imagine Jesus' disciples thinking—maybe talking among themselves, "Wha-a-at? Doesn't he **know** what the other side is all about?"

- a. Jesus and the disciples didn't even get there before they ran into trouble. In crossing the lake, they hit this killer storm that threatens all their lives. I can imagine them thinking, "See-e-e? **Told** you this was a bad idea!" That is until Jesus stands up and scolds the wind lake a naughty child—and there's peace.
- b. On the Israel side, thousands of people are hanging onto Jesus' every word. On the **other** side, the reception committee is this man possessed—demented—by an evil spirit. Again, the disciples are probably thinking, "**I'm not surprised!** Nobody goes to the other side!"

-This guy had terrorized the community. Because of him, it wasn't even safe to travel in that area. It was an awful, scary sight—like something out of a horror movie. He was naked, screaming and howling, attacking people, cutting himself. They'd tried chaining him—and he **broke the chains!** And he comes after Jesus.

He shouted at the top of his voice, "What do you want with me, Jesus, Son of the Most High God? In God's name don't torture me (Mark 5:7 TNIV)!"

- c. Jesus asks him his name—and he gives a **very** interesting answer. Anyone remember what it was? **Legion—for we are many!** Given the fact that there was a Roman legion there—this was a terrifying word—and symbolized all the powers Jesus was up against on the other side. Jesus orders the demons out—guess where they go. Into a herd of 2000 pigs grazing close by. The pigs stampede and run down a bank into the lake and drown.
- We tend to think of pigs as cute little animals—you know, like P-p-porky Pig, and it seems kind sad to us. What makes this interesting is that the symbol of Roman power was the boars head! To the Israelites, this would be like a battle between the forces of light and darkness. Darkness lost. Imagine that you're a pig-herder, and your supervisor comes by to check on you and asks, "Where are the pigs?" "Well, u-u-uh—they ran off a cliff and committed mass **pork-icide.**"
- d. You'd think the people here would be glad Jesus healed this madman. **They weren't!** Matthew's account says,

Scared to death, the swineherds bolted. They told everyone back in town what had happened to the madmen and the pigs. Those who heard about it were angry about the drowned pigs. A mob formed and demanded that Jesus get out and not come back (Matt.8:33-34 Msg.).

Fascinating!

2. The second amazing thing that happens in this story is how Jesus deals with the man who's been set free from a legion of demons. He comes and falls in front of Jesus—I mean, he's been tormented all this life, and he **begs** for Jesus to take him with him—to the **good** side of the lake! Jesus says, "Don't follow me. Stay and tell your story." Jesus asked most people to **follow** him! This man **wants** to and Jesus says, "Stay!"
- So, Jesus and his disciples get into the boat and sail off—this guy getting smaller and smaller in the rear view mirror.
- a. You have to understand—this was not a little detour Jesus went on. He wanted his closest followers, his disciples... **US**...to understand that He loves the **other side**. That, to him—it's not the dark, the evil—side. All sides belong to Him! Sometimes Jesus followers don't get that, see—we think Jesus is on **OUR** side.
- b. Like Paul Harvey used to say, and now here's the **rest** of the story.....**Good day!"**

-It's found in Mark 8. Jesus was back on the good side—and produced a magnificent picnic lunch—checkered tablecloth, ants and everything—for 5000 people. Then his disciples picked up—**12** basketfuls that were left over. Get it? 12 tribes of Israel...12 disciples...

-**Then** they went to the other side—with a repeat of the storm and everything! One pathetic guy jammed with demons showed up the first time; the rest told Him to split, get out, make like a banana and peel. Listen to what happens this time. Matt. 15 gives some detail:

Great crowds came to him, bringing the lame, the blind, the crippled, the mute and many others, and laid them at his feet; and he healed them. The people were amazed...And they praised the God of Israel (Matt. 15:30-31 TNIV).

Hmmm! Wonder what this former crazy guy had been doing?

-This is one of the **most** dramatic responses to Jesus in his entire ministry. Jesus again multiplies bread and fish and feeds 4000. Guess how many basketfuls they picked up. Seven. That number is significant too—because **seven** Canaanite nations had settled there!

-I can imagine this guy going around this whole area saying, “Remember the stories you heard about the naked, insane guy who howled like a dog and broke chains? **I'm that man!** That's who I **was**; this is who I **am**; Jesus made the difference. Do you want to know more?” It changed **whole cities!**

- c. The message is pretty clear. When the Good News gets to the God-forsaking, pig-eating, devil-worshipping, Roman-infested **other side, things change!** Oh yes—and **all** the sides belong to Jesus!

- C. Jesus has a crazy plan for this world to come to Him. Know what his secret weapon is? It's **you**. And **me**. And it includes **everyone** who associates themselves with the Name of Jesus.

-Let me tell you how it works. It's the paradigm of this story. Someone comes from the “other side” to us in the most powerful Name in the Universe—the Name of Jesus. See, the Name of Jesus can free people from **anything**; He can turn insanity into sanity. And we are transformed. Some parts of it are instantaneous—like this guy in the story; some parts take time. But **everybody** needs to be transformed—whether they're religious rule-keepers and churchleaders—or hellraisers. **Everyone** needs Jesus.

-But that's just the **beginning**. The transformation is ongoing. Jesus compared it to birth. Any of you Mom's deliver a baby that was doing push-ups, playing the piano or riding a bike in the neo-natal unit? Good. What they **do** have in the little, red, wrinkled helpless form is the **potential** for **BECOMING** an athlete, a musician, a counselor, a loving, caring happy capable person! But the **becoming** takes time and **considerable** effort. When they're done—they look like, live like, and love like a fully functioning adult. Probably a little like Mom and Dad!

1. This is my point. The ultimate goal for us, over time, is to be like Jesus. To look like Him. To live like Him. To love like Him. It's for us to **be with** Jesus and **believe** in Jesus—but **way** more. It's for us to **become** like Jesus. And to take on his mission. That's it! Romans 8:28-29 says it like this:

And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose. For those God foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the likeness of his Son... (Rom. 8:28-29 NIV).

-I want you to think for a minute about Jesus—what He is like. He split history in half. His closest followers, eleven common men, were so **thoroughly** transformed that their lives and their message changed the world. Why? Well, because by being with Jesus—watching Jesus—they became **like** Jesus.

2. Our dream here at The Olive Branch is to be a safe community where undecided people can ultimately become devoted followers of Jesus. If you and I are going to **become** all we were created to be, we will have to choose to **follow** and **obey** Jesus. You can become an amazing business person, a stunning financial success, and amazing athlete or musician or surgeon—and **miss your calling!** Think that's amazing?
You can become a well-known religious person, lead whole religious organizations, memorize the Bible and write books on theology and **miss your calling!**
-See, God's calling on your life is not just to make the most of your skills, or become religious. It's to become like Jesus. His earliest followers looked and acted so much like Christ that, people taunted them by calling them **little Christ's** or **Christians**
3. So, what did Jesus **look** like? He looked pretty...ordinary. Didn't have a halo; I mean, he sweat, ate, got tired, laughed, yawned, coughed, cleared his throat like everyone else. Let me just open it up. What do you think it might mean to **look** like Jesus?
-My guess is that if I was to look like Jesus, it would be obvious to others that I wasn't into impression management. That people were my priority—not me, not my stuff. That I wasn't living the crazy-busy, hydro-plane-over-the-surface life everyone else seems to be stuck in.
-If people watched me, I would be **normal**. **THAT'S** a stretch, isn't it! What if **you** looked like Jesus?
4. What would it mean for us to **live** like Jesus? What do **you** think that would look like? I think it would look like relational, emotional and spiritual **excellence**, don't you?
-I believe Jesus had as much of a sex drive as any man here—but he lived with purity as a single person. And he did this **along with** having great friendships with women! **Character** would be a part of it. To do business with, to have a relationship with, to be at a party with Jesus was always a really **good** thing. He was generous, honest. And he was filled with courage. That's what **I** covet.
-And Jesus was brilliant—relationally and in the way he handled his life and affairs. And to live like him would mean to live with simplicity. He knew how to handle huge success without getting a **Messiah** complex—and how to handle what would look like defeat.
5. But the most profound characteristic of Jesus' life was His love. How He loved the Father, how He loved his followers—and how He loved people no one else would love or even get close to.

- a. The clearest thing that comes from this story is how Jesus loved those on the **other side**. And his love was powerful! It forced a legion of demons to find another home; it blew through years of pride, prejudice and racism. Truth is, love caused Jesus—not just to cross the lake, but to step out of Heaven, lay aside all his prerogatives as God, and came here for **us!**
- b. As you know, I could spend a whole message talking about Jesus love. It's the single characteristic Jesus want most to see in us. Love, awe, wonder, unflinching obedience to the Father—and love for others that's willing to set self aside greed, pride and selfishness. The snapshot of love that won my heart—maybe yours—is that of Jesus hanging, dying on a cross, the blood dripping into the dirt—knowing it was for **me!**
-If we increasingly learn to love like Jesus loved, that would pretty much take care of everything else!

III. JESUS HITS THE ROAD!

- A. Know what I think? I think most people have this inner urge—this drive—to make a difference. I think most everyone here has a dream for your life; a dream for the person you could become—the way you could live, the trail of changed lives you could leave behind you—the inner satisfaction of a life that's really lived with excellence. I think sometimes those dreams get junked up with narcissistic fantasies—you know, about being rich, or famous, or popular—being the rock star, the media star, the marketplace star. But I think when we cut to the core, what that's **really** about is, **I want to make a difference! I don't want to just fade off this planet without having accomplished my mission!**
-And I need to say—Jesus doesn't want that either. He has a plan for me—for you. He created us with a purpose in mind—for how our lives could impact others. Whether we become famous, well-known, or recognized in the process is incidental, really. Our life here is a tiny part of something going on in this universe that is phenomenally huge; where the **true** heroes of life get recognized—not just people who happen to grab the spotlight for a few years here!
 1. This church, The Olive Branch, is about helping everyone—including you—**belong**. Find friends, feel love, companionship—serve and be served. We want everyone to **believe**. To believe in what matters. To see proof, beyond a reasonable doubt, that Jesus claims about himself and about life are real. That He really is **right** about life. And that He lives. And then we want to help everyone **become!** Become the person God created you to be as a fully devoted follower of Jesus.
-Know what happens if you turn Jesus loose in your life? **Jesus turns you loose!** He will **transform** you and **turn you loose**—just like he did the madman in this story; just like He did with his disciples. He will send you into **your** world to just look like Him, live like Him, and love like Him. That's Jesus plan—to set you and I free from the things that bind us, harden our hearts, ruin our lives—and **transform** our worlds by using **us!** I'll bet you have no idea how powerful that is!
 2. The question I want to deal with for a minute or so is—why doesn't that happen? . Followers of Jesus have tended to see belonging and believing in terms of crossing the line of faith.
Putting their full faith in Jesus to give them life, forgive their sins, and send His Spirit to live in them and walk with them.
I've sometimes used the bridge illustration. But you could use a circle:

-People have tended to **cross** the line—and say, “Whew! I’m on the inside! This feels really good—and safe.” And, for a variety of reasons, people have **parked** there. As if Jesus stays in one place—and we stay in one place. Thinking, “Okay—I’ve got the **believe** thing done—and I **belong**.” Now I’ll get on with the rest of my life—and come to church every week or two to continue to improve a little.

-When people do this, they see **spiritual growth** as knowing more of the Bible and becoming a Christian who has better habits and sins less **obviously!** And that **is** important--but it’s **not** what it means to **become**.

3. It’s what happens when we’re born.

a. One day your mother got pregnant. But at that point, you weren’t ready to make your entrance into the world, right? You needed the safety and protection of your mother’s womb until you were developed enough to make your entrance.

-**That’s** how God works to bring us to new birth through Jesus. He puts us in a place where we **belong**, where we develop, grow and learn until our spiritual birth, as Jesus called it, is inevitable. Remember our mission? To be a **safe community for the undecided...!**

b. Now, what happens when a baby’s born into a family?

Well, first of all—the parents are delighted—and **most** of the siblings are happy, at least until they have to start sharing attention and toys!

But the goal of that home is **ultimately** grow that baby to adulthood where they can grow increasingly independent, get a job of their own, a place of their own, and a life of their own

-So, **how** does that happen? Is it just stuffing them full of food? Well, first of all it is—but they need stimulated beyond that. They get taken outside the home frequently—first wrapped up so tight they can’t move—then holding Mom and Dad’s hand. They go to school, hockey, overnights. It’s all this hands-on training so that they learn to take care of themselves, their room, a job, possessions—how to treat people, live responsibly. And one day they’re ready to take on life.

They still come home—they’re always welcome—but they establish their own life, their own mission. **That’s the goal!**

-The ultimate mission in parenting isn’t about how well they do in the home—but how well they do **outside** the home.

4. I believe this is precisely where things sometimes break down in the **becoming** process.

Sometimes there’s the sense that **becoming** as a Christ-follower is pretty much about becoming a better and better family member, becoming the big star in the home—and that’s where it ends.

-The disservice the church has done to followers of Jesus is to make gatherings like this into a kind of fortress—with the world outside being the enemy. Jesus said to be salt and light in the world—i.e., make a difference. He sent his followers **into** the world to serve and love others. You and I **can’t** make a difference without doing that!

-Sometimes groups of Christ-followers have prayed and sung, “God—revive your church! Give your church power!” But they were asking for God’s blessing and power to keep it trapped inside the building so people could feel good. Friends,

that's **ridiculous!** God only gives His power and blessing to people who carry out his mission--help people **go to the other side**; not sit in pews and feel blessed. Acts 2—the Spirit comes—they **immediately** go to the streets and talk to all the nations—and 3000 come to know Jesus. Acts 4, they pray for boldness—and the boldness is used to reach even more people and live with extreme generosity.

-I personally don't believe God wastes his power on people who just want to feel better—and do nothing!

5. All that to say this: When we talk about people **becoming**, we are talking about helping people live out **Jesus'** mission wherever they are! Does that involve serving others here in this community? Of course it does! I wouldn't have a job if that weren't true. But God **never**—hear me on this, **NEVER** intended for his church to be a cool little group, consuming services, sitting in a circle singing **cum-bay-yah**—just shining up their lives for Jesus.

-We are called to **the other side**. Jesus came to change us, give us power—and **turn us loose!**

- B. When you look at Jesus' strategy—that's precisely the way it was with the disciples. He spent three years with them; gave them a whole variety of hands on learning experiences. Taught them who God really was, who He really was. Took them to the other side—through some very scary experiences with storms, hostile religious professionals, demon possessed people, need. He brought them face to face with their own prejudices, sent them out 2 X 2. And he brought them right up close to where he paid the ultimate price on a cross.

-After he rose from the dead—he gathered them and said, "Okay. You've seen me—now you go and do what you've seen me do—in the power of the Spirit--for the **rest of the world** I've got your back—so, don't worry! **I'm turning you loose!**"

-John Ortberg puts it like this:

I would imagine that they were very disappointed in that strategy. It's almost laughable. A couple of hundred people; what are the odds? Think about it. If you were a Martian looking down on the world in the first century in about 35 A.D., who would you think would be more likely to survive: Christianity or the Roman Empire? You would not bet on a rag-tag group of a few hundred people claiming that an obscure carpenter had risen from the grave. And yet his movement was so successful that today we give our children names like Peter and Paul and Mary, and we name our dogs Caesar and Nero!"

1. If people you know ask you **where** your church is, you **shouldn't** say, "Well, it's at 175 Anderson Ave. Not far from Hwy. 48 off of Bur Oak..."

-That's the **building**, but the **Church?** Well, the church is in an insurance office downtown; it's teaching 6th graders at William Berzcy; it's in a corporate office in Mississauga, or flying a plane to Thunder Bay, or in a university class at York University, or caring for 3 pre-schoolers in a home just off Yonge Street.

-On **Sundays** we gather at 175 Anderson Ave. to grow and encourage and help each other—but on **Monday**, well, that's a different story. **Jesus gets turned loose all over the GTA and beyond!** Do you see the plan? And where the people of Jesus go—if they **become** like Jesus, the focus will not be accumulating the biggest bankroll or growing the biggest reputation in Toronto. No, it will be on serving others and redeeming lives.

2. Now, I could take a number of illustrations from this passage and apply them to us.
 - For example, that **we will feel scared and ill-prepared**. Matthew had barely become a follower of Jesus when he was taken to the other side.
 - The **way will be filled with storms and opposition**. Like the disciples, we will think, “Jesus—this is just *too hard!*”
 - There will be times when you’ll reach the other side, tired, crabby, seasick--and it will feel like the **demons** rule. But they don’t! Jesus rules—and He is way bigger than the scariest situation you can imagine.
 - And our mission is still—hear me—**still** Jesus’ mission. On the **other** side finding lost sheep—not joining the pig herders and growing, buying and selling porkbellies!
 - And if you will see Jesus turning **you** loose, watching your back, giving you power to go to the other side—it’s **amazing** what can happen.
3. Jesus called the coming of his Kingdom—a kingdom where He lovingly leads and rules and preserves and brings light—**GOOD NEWS!** It’s the best news in the world. It’s **good news** in my life, and your life. But friends, when it’s real—it can’t **stay** there. It should be **good news** where you work that **you’re** there! It should be **good news** in my neighborhood, that I live there—and I’m not always sure that it is. If you go to Christian Chicken, or Boston Pizza, or Alice Fazooli’s today for lunch, it should be good news to the people who work there that **you’re** there. This thought makes me wince—but it should be **good news** that I’m driving on any road—not as **obnoxo-man**, but as a kind, generous patient person in whom **Jesus** lives!
 - In other words, if we’re truly becoming the people God has called us to be, it should be **increasingly** true of us that people would say, “You know, I really don’t believe what **she** believes, but I shudder to think what this sub-division, this neighborhood, this family, this school, this office would be like if **she** weren’t there. She adds so much joy, so much love, so much compassion so much courage—this would be a poorer place without her influence!”
4. On **Sunday** we gather. But on **Monday**, Jesus goes on the road! Through us. He sends us to the other side. The weapons of Jesus’ kingdom are brooms, rakes, visits, listening ears, caring eyes, open hands and generous hearts. When someone’s heart gets changed by Jesus—He intends that it be **Good News, REALLY Good News** for **everyone!** And it should be good news for the other side when we show up!

IV. CLOSING

I need to ask you this morning. Where’s the **other side** for you? What’s the other side Jesus is calling you to? What kind of person is He calling you to become? What barriers have scared you away from going to the other side? What **is** the other side? Does it start with your family? Is it a different culture you haven’t been willing to love? Is it another generation? Will you love the other side? Will you become, in God’s power, the kind of person that is Good News to the other side? Will you say to Jesus, “Help me love the other side? Help me grow up—and make the difference you’ve called me to make and live out my calling. And, I can guarantee you, **He will!** Our **mission**, our calling as The Olive Branch is to help you **BECOME** that person!