

**Series: BELONG...BELIEVE...BECOME! January 28, 2007**

**WHAT'S GOD UP TO?  
Matthew 28:18-20**

**I. INTRO**

- A. One of the TV shows I used to love as a kid was *Mission Impossible* with Peter Graves. Even the theme song got my blood going! Every week, Peter and his team got a new mission that, humanly speaking, **seemed** impossible. "Your mission, Jim should you **choose** to accept it is...and in 10 seconds, this tape will self-destruct...**POOF!**" -I always wondered, what if Jim were to say, 'Nah. Too hard! Not this time! I think I'll choose my **own** mission!" Of course, he never does. The fact that MI 1, 2 and 3 are hits seems to prove that everyone still finds this stuff intriguing! I personally think Tom's pretty arrogant--but I do like the Mission Impossible films!
- B. What is it that makes people attempt the impossible? Do something that risks their lives, forces them to deal with unknown contingencies, and attempt something everyone else would look at and say, **No way!** Well, usually, a **lot** is at stake. Some crazy person is going to take over the world; a major city is going to get nuked—it's usually a life or death situation for lots of people. If the mission fails, the results are unthinkable. Tom Cruise **might** be out of a job!!
1. After his crucifixion, death and resurrection—Jesus told his eleven disciples that he would meet them all on a hill in Galilee. As they were making their way there—probably on the walk up--the reaction was, quite frankly, mixed. Some worshipped—and some doubted. But then Jesus showed up.
  2. And to these, his closest followers—some *still* probably doubting—He gave his *Mission Impossible* invitation:

**Jesus came and told his disciples, "I have been given all authority in heaven and on earth. Therefore, go and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit. Teach these new disciples to obey all the commands I have given you. And be sure of this: I am with you always, even to the end of the age (Matt. 28:18-20 NLT)."**

3. I want you to think of how **huge** that was; how overwhelming it must've felt. I can imagine these guys looking at each other and thinking, "He's **got** to be kidding!" Eleven followers of a murdered Rabbi—compared with Rome—who rules the world. Our starting point is a city filled with respected religious professionals who hated Jesus and had him executed for blasphemy. This mission is **impossible!** -We are here today as proof that when **God** gives the mission, it is **never** impossible! Jesus said, "Be **sure** of this! **I AM WITH YOU ALWAYS, EVEN TO THE END OF THE AGE.** And the **you** in this passage includes us. Me. And you. -**We** are the ones meeting with Jesus on that mountain in Galilee, and the mission hasn't changed. Make friends with people in all nations; gather them, love them, bring them close enough to my love, my power, what I'm doing in the world. Over time, like you, they'll believe—and go public with baptism! Then tell them everything I've told you—about love, about the Father, about how life works. Then **turn 'em loose to make the difference they were created to make!** -My sense is that the church, if it's not regularly brought back to the mountain, **misses the point!** So, today, we're a goin' to the mountain! I want to talk about

the vision God has given The Olive Branch, the spirit in which we are going to accomplish it—and the implications for us over the next months and years.

-Now, I understand that some of you are checking out Jesus—and you need space to do that without being asked to say anything or sign anything. But I think there are others of you who are ready to engage. So, for you, I'm going to pop the question: Will I, will you, will we accept this mission, give it our best, and live out our calling? Everyone okay with that?

## II. OUR MISSION...SHOULD WE **CHOOSE TO ACCEPT**

- A. What I want to start with this morning is the exact vision I presented when we started The Olive Branch three years ago. I want to do this for two reasons. First, vision leaks. We stray. It becomes ink and paper—and we always need to be called back. Second, a lot of you weren't there when the vision was laid out. At this juncture, we are asking you to join us; to be partners with us. And I think it's only fair that you **know** what we're asking you to partner with, right?

We always have to start with the **definition of a MISSION**. Let me be clear on that. We are not a church that **supports** missions—though, in the classical sense of that word, we do. We see **ourselves** as a mission and **what we do** as a mission. So, what is a mission?

**-A mission is a critically important cause that absolutely must succeed because something valuable is at stake. It's *unthinkable* the mission not be accomplished—or be only half-successful. Because it is a life and death thing, it demands the very best we can give. It demands concentration, devotion...and usually both inconvenience *and* sacrifice. But it is so big, so important, so worthwhile—it's worth it all.**

Jesus said that his mission was to seek and save what was lost. People. That's **our** mission. Our calling is **not** to be a normal church, as our culture sees it—a place to hatch, match, dispatch. We are called to be a MISSION to the undecided. And that will call us to our very best!

-We believe that as we take on this mission and are faithful to it, we will be transformed. Not only will we become more like Jesus, our hearts will be filled with joy and significance—and we will build lifelong friendships. To our **core** we believe that rolling up our sleeves and serving is a critical, irreplaceable component in us becoming like Jesus.

If this mission God has given us to be accomplished is going to get done, some things will have to happen:

1. We will have to live out our name as people who extend the *olive branch*: People who extend the peace and reconciliation God offers through Jesus to those who have never heard that God longs for their friendship. And this will require us to be people who, in Jesus love, offer hope and a second chance to a community that has pretty much lost hope and given up on the church.
2. In this journey, we want to travel with others and live out the wonder and amazement of that first loving, generous community the Bible describes. We **want** that same power, grace, joy and generosity!

Of course, if this is going to happen, we'll have to do what Jesus said: Love God so much that this love spills over into the lives of all the people around us so that we treat them as God's treasure.

3. And we truly believe that God wants us to be a group of people who have **fun** together. We believe this is totally consistent with Who God is—that when what we do ceases to be enjoyable, sin starts to look good. There should always be celebration, adventure and surprise. Because this mission is daring and scary, we *expect* to experience adrenaline rushes, to be filled with awe, to laugh and cry *together*.
4. For our mission to truly be Jesus' mission, we will have to be people who are filled with compassion; people who are quick to come to the side of the poor, the disenfranchised and shoved to the edges of life in our world by disease, poverty and adversity.

-If we will do this, we believe that within five years, The Olive Branch could be one of our community's greatest assets! We feel called to be intensely and practically helpful to others by offering food and other resources, training, support and recovery, care, and help in coming to a place of spiritual health.

5. As a mission, we want to be *without walls*. We will plan for the safety and security of **all** of those entrusted to our care. But we will not tolerate any artificial walls or barriers between us and those God has called us to help.  
-For example, we want community to be extended to every neighbourhood represented by persons in our large gatherings.
6. As a mission, we experiment and work together until we find a way to reach out to and penetrate ethnically and culturally diverse people groups.
7. As a mission, we vow

**to be a safe place for all people to *belong*, to believe in Jesus, and to become the persons God created them to be.**

-Our plan is to help everyone we can live out their calling in the power of the Holy Spirit, experience the Father's love, and become a significant part of Jesus' movement to change the world.

8. Because Jesus' mission is so huge—worldwide in scope, we don't plan—or expect to stay small, cozy and safe. We expect to grow exponentially, while *intentionally* striving for smallness and intimacy and relational depth through helping people be a part of a small Roots Group.

-We say all this because we believe that we have been called by God into existence—commissioned, not just to be another traditional church, but to be a movement of God—part of the revolutionary movement of Jesus going on all over the world right this very minute. We are *serious* about advancing the Kingdom of God, whatever it costs us, in every possible way we can....

-We will not play church or play politics. We will not treat ***The Olive Branch*** as a shopping mall; as a weekend diversion where there are goods to be consumed while we pursue other stuff with our best. We will treat ***The Olive Branch***, the advance of the Kingdom, the infiltration of God into human affairs, not as a hobby or an extra-curricular activity, but as the God's Treasure—Christ's Body-- the Hope of the world.

9. Like any mission, we will learn and speak well the *heart language* of those we are trying to reach. We will use every means at our disposal to speak, act and work in a way that directly speaks to the people around us with words and visuals and concepts that are unmistakably clear and current. And we won't be afraid to think out-of-the-box; to try and sometimes fail! Because ***The Olive Branch*** views itself as a mission, it will probably look very different from what most people expect in a church.
10. With God's powerful help, we will be characterized by:
  - Patient, enduring, self-sacrificing love and acceptance
  - Prayer—so that what happens can only be explained by the intervention of God. We understand that without the power of God behind us, we don't even have a remote chance of accomplishing this dream.
  - We need to ***practice*** humility—and weed out pride. So we will see God for who He is and not over-estimate our gifting, or under-estimate the value of others, but live in the reality that we exist in God's world as His treasured children.
  - We believe that God is honored and others are inspired when people give their very best to Jesus. So we will value each individual and their unique contribution, while seeking to be the very best we can be to the glory of God.
  - Because people are God's treasure, we will value relationships over things, methods, structures, and opinion.
  - We will believe that God has told us the truth about us, about Him, and about life in the Bible. So we will respect and treasure what God has said. And we will give our best to make this truth accessible to everyone. Because we believe God is precisely right in what He has said, everything we say and do will be rooted in that Truth and we will invite the Spirit of God to use that truth to rearrange our hearts and our world.
  - We will pursue ongoing development and growth. We will use every means and every opportunity to help people and free people to belong, believe and become. **Therefore, we encourage Olive Branch people to be:**
    1. ***immersed in the grace of God,***
    2. ***continually growing in their faith,***
    3. ***enfolded in the love and acceptance of a small group that they both invest in and receive from,***

4. ***fully discovering their gifting and engaged in their calling as Christ-followers, and***
5. ***generously re-investing themselves and their resources back into the Kingdom.***

- We will be characterized by total transparency and honesty in all of our dealings and communication as a church. This includes financial records, Governing Board decisions and transactions.
- We will live and act in faith and courage, fully believing that God is in control and that He is Lord of the impossible. We will balance our decisions between wisdom and **great** faith.
- We want to be characterized by outrageous generosity. It will require sacrifice--giving that is **uncomfortably affordable** if we are going to accomplish this mission, as it's laid out. But we believe that God honors generosity—and that no one ever becomes great without learning to give.
- We believe that if we stay on track in our calling, we can become people who are great **God's** way and make a SIGNIFICANT impact in our world!

B. Now, how many of you are going to **remember** that whole thing? Don't lie! I don't even have it all nailed down—and I wrote it. So what we did is come up with a shortened form of it that will help us stay on track.

-There's the **vision** part:

***To see each person in our world become a fully devoted follower of Jesus Christ.***

Everyone needs to be transformed by Jesus' power and life, and we will keep going until everyone is.

-There's our **mission**:

***To be a safe community for anyone to belong, to believe in Jesus, and become the person's God created them to be.*** Our goal is to be **fully devoted to Jesus Christ.**

95% is 5% short!

-But we also thought, "Okay—**how** can we lay this out in a brief way to hold ourselves accountable and use as a grid for making decisions and evaluating how we're doing?"

Well, we come up with eight core values; eight **we wills**.

1. **We will look to the Bible for our foundation and authority.**
2. **We will open our hearts to the leading of the Holy Spirit and have the courage to act in faith.**
3. **We will be good stewards of all our resources.**
4. **We will be culturally relevant.**
5. **We will treat everyone with respect, care and love.** Let me comment briefly on this core value because it is absolutely **huge** here. Our main thing is people—and God has made it clear that we are to treat people as **His** Treasure. Are we all agreed on that?
6. **We will serve others, and we will remember it is not about us.** Friends, The Olive Branch belongs to Jesus and is on orders from Jesus. ***This is NOT about us!***

7. **We will be transparent, honest and authentic.** We will not be slick or cool—because what happens here is not a show. And we will **always** shoot straight with you. Are you tracking with me okay?
8. **We will do everything with joy.** We will love, serve and give in a spirit of **joy**—one of God’s best gifts!

### III. WHAT’S NEXT?

- A. Let me talk to you about a few things that are on the immediate horizon for us at The Olive Branch. See, we’ve set some priorities of things that really **need** to happen in this next year.
  1. The Initiative that’s at the top of our list this year is to grow our ministry to youth. Our goal is to help youth make a great transition from childhood to adulthood; to become fearless God-chasers who change their worlds. So, here’s the plan: We have some fantastic youth volunteers who started the main youth ministry, called **Playing With Fire**. Our current Youth Director, Kelly, took two years off university to help launch things. But she’s going back.
 

-We feel that our next step needs to be to hire an **excellent, passionate, experienced pastor** to take this on. For the Governing Board to make this decision—understanding the financial commitment we were making—we had to follow our core values. Specifically, **We will open our hearts to the leading of the Holy Spirit and have the courage to act in faith?** So, God’s going to make this happen through us. Are you with us?
  2. The second initiative isn’t quite as tangible as that—but very necessary. It’s to establish solid infrastructure for our ministry office and building use. The goal has been to make this building and it’s equipment a great tool for our ministry without hiring someone to manage it. Many **many** of you have been involved in making that a reality—and I want to say a big **THANK YOU!** If you look around you on any given weekend, most of the interior construction, painting and trimming was done by 10’s of **1000s** of volunteer hours!
  3. A third priority here has been to grow our Ministry Partner base. We want everyone to ultimately have a meaningful role in what God is doing. We want you—to be able to use your gifts; to give yourself and your resources in a meaningful way to see our mission accomplished. We want you to have a meaningful role in helping make decisions, in shaping the mission.
 

-To be honest, this is about being what Jesus called us to be; the **Body of Christ**—a team working together. We believe in the snowflake philosophy; one snowflake is fragile and melts in seconds. But when we stick together—**we can stop traffic!** Without apology, I want to ask you to engage. It’s not complicated at all. This is a ministry partner form. Read through it, fill it out—and if you are in agreement with following Jesus, and with our mission, then ask another Ministry Partner to sponsor you—and we will welcome you as a partner—just like we did with people this morning.
  4. A fourth priority is to identify and develop leaders. Read history, read the Bible—whenever God wants to get something done, He raises up a leader.
 

-Almost without fail, when God asks someone to lead, they have an excuse as to why someone else would do a better job. Moses said, “I stutter!” Gideon said, “God—I’m from Punxsutawney!” Actually—“I’m insignificant!” Paul says, “You know, it’s really interesting—God **hasn’t** chosen the strong, the witty, the intelligent, the powerful...so that He gets the glory, not talent!”

-If you're the one making an excuse right about now—I just want to say, making yourself available is **key** to finding your sweet spot—and your calling.

5. A fifth initiative is that we want to **Increase our visibility in the community**. We feel that the best way to do that is to engage with people's needs. With their need for friendship, their need for help, their need for practical assistance—in reality, with their need for someone to serve them in Jesus' name.
  - a. In our vision, you heard that our sense of calling to be one of our communities **greatest** assets. As I said, We set a time frame on that—in 5 years. We've got 2 years left. If we're going to live that out, we will have to find pockets of need—and **engage!**

**For example:**

    - \*The needs of teens. Right now we are prepared to offer help to parents in drug-proofing their kids.
    - \*What if we were to become a major force in helping tutor kids, being a friend to single parents in the challenge of doing parenting all alone...the list goes on and on!
    - \*The needs in marriages. Divorce in our community has taken a huge toll. Those who have been devastated by it need support in a lot of ways. Wouldn't it be cool if we could be a major force of love & support for those who need it?
  - b. And then there's the huge, **huge** calling of Jesus to serve the poor. We made a decision when we started this church that 10% of **everything** that gets donated here goes to serve the poor. We have kept that commitment. -Let me be really clear on this: Our calling as a church is not to become a social agency; it's to be a **mission..** We **will** help the poor and needy—hopefully in **hundreds** of ways—massive ways. But I think our best work will be measured, not by how much money comes through our books for these causes, but by the huge hearts we build; by the people who, because their hearts have been changed, **start** organizations and find bold, creative ways to make a difference!
    - I think we would do better to measure how well we're doing, not by how much money is donated, but by **how many people** from The Olive Branch are serving the poor, oppressed and broken in our world in any given year. I would hope that all of us are fully engaged in supporting children and ending AIDS and stupid poverty in the GTA and all over the world through agencies like Samaritan's Purse, World Vision, World Relief, Christian Children's Fund, Scott Mission, Out of the Cold, Salvation Army—and the many, **many** agencies set up to care for those needs!
    - I just need to say that I am **so** proud of **Branch Out**, headed by John Deacon—and the ways they are helping us to engage all we have to offer. **Yea God for their leadership and influence!**
- B. Let me talk for just a minute about some things that are out there a little way for us. Is that okay? The one key initiative I didn't mention is to build the foundation for our **Roots** foundation. We decided at the beginning that small groups—living in community with 5, 6, 8, 10, 15 other people—was going to be a critical component of The Olive Branch living out our calling. It's in these smaller groupings that we find our gifts—usually—learn best, love best, and serve best.
  1. To be honest, our initial goal this year was that we would hire a pastor to really help drive this ministry into the fabric of our church—and eventually our

community. Our dream was that ***no one stands alone!*** That we all put down roots into the lives of others and the life of God that nourish, fill us with hope, support us, and keep us from getting blown down by rogue winds.

-Well, we couldn't hire in two major areas at once, so we decided to keep the leadership of this at the volunteer level for now. But the value runs deep.

-I'll tell you what we need. We need ***Roots Leaders!*** We need a growing group of people who not only make time in their lives to live as Jesus lived--in community—but who will gang up together and help us drive this value deep into The Olive Branch and beyond!

2. Want to know what my dream for this is? To ultimately extend the gift of community to ***every neighborhood in Markham and beyond.***
  - Dream with me a little. What if every follower of Jesus here saw themselves as the ***chaplain*** of their neighborhood—whether in Markham, Unionville, Thornhill, Pickering, Stouffville, Richmond Hill or Toronto. And that person—maybe you—agreed to be the point person who gathered people—irregardless of religion, culture, or whatever. That group would be about supporting each other, about character; about helping other neighbors in need; about watching out for each others children; about getting to know each other and love each other.
  - Think of the ***power*** of something like that spreading, quite naturally, really, from neighborhood to neighborhood—people helping each other. Imagine a growing neighborhood network—where no one was more than a bicycle ride away from support; every one of these little communities a point of light. That, friends, would ***change*** the face of Markham! I'm not even sure where to start—but that's my dream.
3. Another dream. I think of the vast number of cultures and languages represented by those immigrating to Toronto. And what about the ***1000s*** who move to Markham every year from other cultures. What if we could love and serve them helping them engage, adjust and learn English. What if, by word of mouth—people would ***know*** WE would help? What if the love of Jesus moved from our hearts—and just kept penetrating and transforming cultures and spreading to places and people whose names we can't even pronounce!
4. One more piece. From our vision, it's clear that we will ***never*** be this cozy little community, contented to be a nice little church. We are a ***MISSION.*** God willing, ever year we will see an ever-increasing number of people belonging, believing in Jesus, and becoming the persons God created them to be.
  - If we are going to be responsibly handle the resources God has given us—including this building—that will mean eventually using it multiple times. As you can see by looking around, we're not far from two services. We will need ***everyone's*** help to do that—to multiply our ministry to children, for parking, for the band, tech team—etc. We're going to talk about that with the Ministry Partners—and anyone else interested—after the service. My simple question is: ***Will you support us in that?***
  - See, if our dream becomes reality, we will always struggle with space issues. And it will be messy—sometimes tough. But that's Jesus' calling—it's ***His*** revolution of love. It's not about our comfort. So everyone here needs to be part of the solution side of this!
5. Let me tell you about another piece to this that's part of the future—and really isn't even on the drawing board yet. We anticipate that the best way we can make a difference with as many people as possible is to eventually multiply ***satellite***

locations. Like a growing group in downtown Toronto, or Uxbridge, or Scarborough, or Vaughan--who knows where? Videos or PODcasts of our services would be shown and multiple congregations of The Olive Branch would gather—and the Good News would just continue to spread and branch out—gathering people Jesus gave His life for. Wouldn't that be cool? But we have to build the infrastructure for all that.

#### IV. JOIN THE JESUS REVOLUTION!

- A. Right now, friends, is a fantastic time to be alive. There is a Jesus revolution that is growing and building momentum around the world—and we are **SO** part of it! We hear so much gloomy news—let me give you some **GOOD NEWS!:**
1. In 1800, 1% of all Christians were thought to live outside of North America and Europe. Now, **2/3** do! The world-wide revolution of Jesus is catching fire all over the world—in places like South Africa, South America, South India and South China. And also in some very surprising places. Did you know that in Indonesia, **1 million people** join Jesus every single year! And there are similar stories coming out of unlikely places like Iraq, Iran, Morocco and Algeria.
  2. Some of you are familiar with Willow Creek—a church of 20,000 people. Did you know that Willow doesn't even make the list of the 50 largest churches in the world? The largest is in Seoul, Korea with an attendance of 250,000, then one in Cote D'Ivoire with 150,000—others of similar size in Santiago, Chile, Medellin, Colombia, Hyderabad, India. One researcher, Philip Jenkins from Penn State, says, "If you want to think of the typical Christian today, think of a woman living in a village in Nigeria or in a Brazilian flat.
  3. These are **amazing, courageous** people! There are countless stories coming in of illiterate pastors who stand up in front of illiterate congregations, open God's Word, and are given the power to read it to their people!  
 -And people suffering persecution for their faith is common. Know what they report back to us in North America? They **pity** us because we don't have the blessing of being persecuted for the Kingdom of Jesus! And some of the stuff happening is right out of the stories of the early church.  
 -These churches are sending out their **own** missionaries. 50% of the missionaries are being sent by the non-western church. Some are being sent here to Toronto. I kid you not!
- B. This is my point: **God is breaking through! Do you want to be a part of the Jesus Revolution? Will you? I don't think you want to miss it!**