

Series: 5TH BIRTHDAY CELEBRATION—November 23, 2008

NOW...TO THE *FRINGES* OF YOUR WORLD!

1. How many of you remember the day you were born. That's probably a good thing—because it would be one **scary** memory! Noise, cold, bright lights, forceps. How many of you **Moms** remember giving birth? It's an...unforgettable experience isn't it? -Lori's and my first birth experience took place in a **birthing suite**. I include myself in that experience as a kind of an accessory. Lori did the work; I just yelled and waved pompoms. It was a cool place with a living room, TV, personal bathroom. But the truth is—when it comes right down to giving birth—all that stuff fades into the distance in the middle of the pain and the mess—and the wail of a brand new life!

-That setting would **not** describe the birth of The Olive Branch. It was a little more like giving birth in the back seat of a taxi cab. Messy. Less than glamorous. But it **happened**, and here we are—five years later.

-What I've discovered over the years is that many births **seem** unplanned—at least from our perspective. But God never says, **Oops!** when a baby is born. And Heaven never says, **Oops!** when a church comes into existence.

-And when a church is birthed—and people are listening—God gives a vision. And churches either have the courage to live that vision, or they settle into becoming little clubs—centered around the comfort and convenience of the already gathered. One of the most compelling—and demanding thoughts God gave us all when we prepared for our first meeting at Angus Glen Golf and Country Club, November 30, 2003, was, **This is NOT about us!**

-If we were going to start a church in an area of the world where less than 10% of the people follow Jesus—it had better **not** be about us! We realized, “This is a **mission**. So, we need to **act** like a mission.” Our most passionate prayer was that we would be more than a little community church; that we would become a growing **movement** of people, passionate about Jesus and His mission in a post-Christian world.
 - a. So, in a world like the GTA that worships golf, we met in one of its most prestigious temples. The Angus Glen Golf and Country Club—a **gorgeous** location, I might add.
 - b. And in a world that worships sex, we permanently took over one of the GTA's primary temples--**Friction**—and did the mother of all **Extreme Home Makeovers**.
 - c. But in all the stuff that's happened and all the decisions we've made—our plan, our goal has been to reach those who have a spark of spiritual longing—but are deeply suspicious of anything remotely connected with religion or Christianity. -Our mission statement was—and is—**to be a safe community for undecided people to decide—to belong, to believe in Jesus, and to become all God created them to be.**

2. So, the question is—how will that happen? Well—one by one through **our** influence in **our** world. How many of you are here because of the influence of a friend or acquaintance or relative who either told you about The Olive Branch or invited you? -Typically somewhere between 75-90% of the people who believe in Jesus do so because of the influence of a friend. How many of you have at least **one** friend? You could probably list about 10 people that are in your friendship circle—people you live with, work with, play with. It's the people who will most likely feel the influence of our lives.

-And they are **also** the ones who would very likely gather here if you invited them to a Christmas Eve service—or to one of our community outreach events. The cool thing is that God uses people **just like us** who have the courage to reach out to our friends.

-Jesus gathered people around him—people he somehow met. They became his apprentices. And then He entrusted his **entire story and mission** into their hands—and sent them out. They were flawed people—just like **me!** Oh—and Just like **you!** The simple message was, “Go do for others, in my Name, what I have done for you.”

3. So, what **did** Jesus do for them? The first thing He did was accept them as they were. Believe in them. Think about that for a minute. God shows up on this planet as a man; he spends 30 years in an ordinary trade as a carpenter or stone mason. Then he goes public—and gathers together 12 men as his apprentices.

- a. But in being accepted by Him, helped by Him and loved by Him—they felt like they **belonged**. The inner sense that you **belong** is a powerful, **powerful** thing. Every human being wants **desperately** to belong! Anyone here ever been in a setting where you felt, “I don't **belong** here!” **Nasty** feeling!

-Shortly after we moved to Markham from Punxsutawney, PA, we were invited to a Christmas gathering and were told, “Dress casual.” We found out that those two words mean something very different in small town PA than in Markham! That's not all—we were the only ones to bring “the clan.” We felt like the Beverly Hillbillies!

- b. Jesus made it clear that carrying on his mission means loving, accepting, caring for and helping others. To be a safe community means that **anyone** who comes will be loved and accepted and valued **just as they are!** So, our unspoken covenant with each other was—and is, “We will do everything in our power to help people to belong to us—because they already rightfully belong to Jesus. He **paid** for them!!” See, the Good News that God accepts us as we are doesn't make sense unless they **feel** that acceptance from us.

- c. We want **you** to feel in your heart, “These people are kinda just like me—I **belong** here!” We want everyone associated with you—kids, boyfriend, parents—any guest you bring to feel loved, accepted and valued! That's what Jesus would do—and **we represent Him!**

-Here's the deal. For that to happen consistently--we need your help. Everyone's help. If everyone here runs for their friends before and after gatherings—then people will feel that they've come to a club. For us to raise this value of belonging—we will all have to be intentional about it. Is that fair?

So—how about it—will you help? This sense of belonging needs to get more intimate—as we gather in smaller groups, families, house churches. We call this part of our church **Roots**—because it helps people develop roots!

4. Jesus also called the people around Him to **believe**. To believe that their Father in Heaven loved them and cared for them. That what He said about life was true. And—specifically, to **believe in Him**—God’s Son. That He could give them life and rest and peace.

-And I just need to say, without any hesitation, our prayer—our goal in all we do here—is to help people believe in Jesus. Follow Him. Believe He is who He claimed to be. Jesus is God’s means of giving life and forgiveness and restoring the world. He does that by **transforming** people’s lives.

- a. Let me talk about **believing** for just a minute. Everybody believes in something. Anyone here ever flown on a plane? How many of you understand how a plane works—and have met the person flying it—and you know they’re not crazy or drunk? You **believe!**

-And everyone believes in something they think will make their lives better, give them hope, and take care of things after death. It could be money—or this little scrap bag of ideas we’ve collected over time—but **everybody** believes.

- b. The question we ask here is this, “Is what you believe true? Can it make you a better person, help you find your way, protect you in the scary parts of life, bring you joy—and get your home when life is over? Does it challenge you—or does it just excuse you?”
- c. I believe in Jesus—and teach about Jesus—not because I’m paid to do it, but because He makes sense of life. Jesus offers hope for this life and beyond. He’s **changed** my life—and many of yours. So. **What do you believe?**

5. Finally, Jesus called those around them to **BECOME**. To become something they never thought they could become—not in their wildest dreams. For example, the moment Jesus met Simon—he renamed him **Peter**—“The Rock!” Truth is, Peter could be quite undependable and quick-tempered.

-Shortly into his mission, he paired them up to go from town to town, announce this new Kingdom, heal people, and cast out demons. No seminary I’ve heard of does that!

- a. You have to understand—no one would’ve ever looked at these guys and said, “Wow, Jesus must’ve been having a good day when he found **them!**” These men had likely all been passed over by when other Rabbi’s were looking for the cream of the crop. But after apprenticing with Jesus—and, **especially**, with the power of the Holy Spirit working through their lives— they flipped the world on its ear. **That’s our heritage!** Ordinary people who, in the power of God, become extraordinary!

- b. Everyone needs to **know** that they have a purpose in life—way bigger than they'd ever dream. And then they have to pursue it—not half-heartedly, not trying to advance their own egos—but for **the sake of the world**.

-How many of you think it works for people to think, “I'd like to be a part of a cool group of people who change the world—but I **myself** don't really want to give, sacrifices, serve, or engage.” Jesus said that true greatness starts by **us** becoming **servants!** Servants of the Most High God.

- c. It's so important for **you** to know that God has a plan--a **purpose** for your life! It's **way** bigger than you'd ever believe. It's a plan for you to **become**. Even if you don't think much of yourself or believe in yourself—God believes in you, and you'd be shocked—**blown away**, really, if you could see yourself as **He** sees you—with the plans He has for you and the impact He's designed you to have. The key is this; It's **not about you!** It's about Him—and what He's up to.

-If you've chosen to follow Jesus—the Spirit has take up residence in you—and when He came, He brought house-warming gifts—spiritual abilities--that, when they are mixed with your personality and natural talents, will give you **all** you need to be a transforming influence in your world.

-Our goal has been to help everyone here at The Olive Branch find their wings! And a **lot** of people have found their wings. Some just saw areas of need and jumped in and served. Some have had an idea—or a vision—for a whole new ministry. Some have either founded or jumped on board with organizations that make a **huge** difference in people's lives.

- d. See, if you are waiting to become a **better** person—or waiting for the **perfect** opportunity—you may miss your chance to make a difference. Do you believe that God has a purpose for your life—and is **waiting** to use you? I **dream** about what God could do through a group of goofed up people—who passionately believe that God wants to use them to change the world!

6. In our original vision-casting time for The Olive Branch, our plan for this brand new church was that we would **be** a mission—not **do** missions. Know why? **Because that was what God intended his gathered people, his “church” to be!** When you read about the church in history—it's fascinating; there's not a whole lot written about their “services.”

- a. In fact, when Jesus died and rose from the dead, his disciples—apprentices, students—became **apostles**—sent ones. Friends, they weren't the last to be called—and to be sent. We have **all** been called, we have **all** been sent. The church of Jesus has never been a building, or a religion or an institution. It's **people**. People who regularly gathered for teaching, encouragement—and then spread out into **their** world—seeing themselves as representatives of the God who reigned over everything—including Caesar.

- b. Jesus never told his followers to **do missions**. He said, “As you're going—gather people, help them figure out Who I am and go public, teach them

everything I've taught you—and release them into their world of influence. And by the way: **All** authority and **all** power has been given to me—and **I will be with you—right up to the end!**

- c. Here's the question I want to ask. When you think about all Jesus did and all he stood for and taught—what would it look like if **He** showed up and **His** will was done in your world.

*My guess is that the people of your world would feel loved and accepted; that even people who are **extremely** irreligious would want to be with Him.

*Jesus would let them know, especially in a world like ours with an economy in crisis—that there is a Heavenly Father totally in control—and He knows where they hurt!

*Jesus would notice and touch and heal the lives of people who usually never get noticed or touched—but desperately need healed.

*And Jesus would see beyond the embarrassing flaws and failures of the people around us—and notice the gift they had to give the world. He would bring hope.

7. Our goal at the start of The Olive Branch was, to be honest, both impact...and **survival!** It's clear that, with God's help, we **will** survive. And now it's impact. Brian Cunnington, one of our leaders, says, **We gather...to scatter!** The point of us being together is not just to shine up our lives a little and feel better; it's to scatter, with God in our hearts--to our world that desperately needs God—and **be** the church. When Christ-followers everywhere live like that—it will **turn the world upside down!** And **that's** the movement we want to become.

-Know what we pray for? That what happens here on any given weekend is miniscule compared to what God does through us when His church truly **is** the church out to the fringes. When we don't just see ourselves as **gathered** people—but **sent** people! Because, see, that's **who** we are. **That's** a church without walls! Opposition? Post-modernism? Rejection of religion and morals? Hostility? Collapse of an economy? Based on history, those things just fan the flame—make God's sent people even **more** effective!

-But we have to have a vision for our lives that is **way** bigger than surviving each week—and making our lives a little more safe and comfortable. God's calls us—and gives us His Spirit—and gives us our opportunities—to leave here every weekend—and **turn things upside down!**

-I want you to think about **belong, believe and become** in terms of your world. What if you were to think about **your** world as the place where **God has specifically called you to and placed you in...FOR THE SAKE OF THE WORLD?** Because, knowing what I know about God—that's exactly what has happened. No one just **drops** into a place in life where they hang until God calls them to something **really** important. You are where you are because God has placed you there to have a transforming influence. In Jesus words:

“You are the salt of the earth. But what good is salt if it has lost its flavor? Can you make it salty again? It will be thrown out and trampled underfoot as worthless. “You are the light of the world—like a city on a hilltop that cannot be hidden. 15 No one lights a lamp and then puts it under a basket. Instead, a lamp

is placed on a stand, where it gives light to everyone in the house. In the same way, let your good deeds shine out for all to see, so that everyone will praise your heavenly Father. (Matthew 5:13-16 NLT)

How many of you think that salt can do its thing—flavor, preserve, melt ice, save life--when it's stuck in a carton or highway barn? It **has** to have contact. It's the same with light—it has to have contact with darkness to be effective. Weekend services are not the place to shine your light; they're about replace batteries and bulbs! Our light is for the places in our world that don't have a **clue** that God offers forgiveness and life. -What if, in your world, it was simply clear that you really, **really** loved God...and really, **really** loved others? And that's all you did. Loved. Ever met a thoroughly loving person? If you have—they probably changed your life.

- a. What if you were to take, to your world, a passion to help people **belong**. If you asked God to make you—at school, at Wal-Mart, No-Frills, Longos, IBM, Master-Mind, cubicle land and “I actually forgot who I work for” world—an accepting, caring person who noticed others and cared for them until they asked you why?”
- b. And what if you saw yourself as someone Jesus would use to help others who've stopped believing—to believe again? What if you lived your faith transparently until people asked you, as the Bible says, to give a reason for it? You are **the single most important and effective means** of helping people know that the truth about Jesus is real.

By the way, most people are **not** looking for someone who's almost perfect; they're just looking for someone who's humble enough to admit it—and apologize when they screw up.

- c. And what if you and I could be examples of what it means to **become**—all that God has created us to be? The best parents we can be; the best workers we can be; the best neighbors we can be; and the best care-givers of our world we can be?

-Look at everyone here, about all the people we contact—and **think** about what it would mean for belonging, believing and becoming to go right out to the fringes of where we all live our lives. What if our faith in Jesus—and the impact and goodness from our lives was **so** contagious—that we were dangerous?

8. Our world sees church as a building. Or an institution whose influence in our world has had mixed results. Some good. Some bad. Some ugly. Some downright toxic. When religion goes bad—it goes **really** bad. Some people say, “See, **that's** why I don't believe in the church!”
 - a. The only hope for some people—people all around us—is for them to encounter genuine, loving, generous followers of Jesus—people who are filled with integrity, who back up what they say they believe with how they live. And then they will begin to see Jesus for who He really is—and the forgiveness and power He offers to ordinary people.

-You **can** make a difference. **We** can make a difference—way more than we'd ever dream.

- c. What if our love for people God loves got so compelling in our hearts—that the overflow spilled out everywhere? What if The Olive Branch were kind of splattered into little points of light all over the GTA which became safe places for people to build friendships.

-Think of how many ethnic groups are represented in Toronto? What if the spillover from what happens to us ultimately made it into every single one of them? What if every empty space in downtown Toronto was filled with apprentices of Jesus? What if the goodness of God poured out of us into some of the worst areas of the world—calling them to believe in the God who stands behind it all?

-What if what has happened so far wasn't just added to—but **multiplied!** **Here's** a "what if"--what if we actually became one of the GTA greatest assets—simply because we **BECAME** all God intended us to be?

9. We have this one shot in life, a few measly years, when you get right down to it—to make a **difference** for eternity! I'll tell you what it will take. It will take our best. It will take some financial sacrifice. When we had the chance to buy this building—we had about 3 weeks to raise \$2 million in cash. It was a miracle—we **did!** But not without sacrifice. I'll never forget Harry James, who was leading the charge, standing in front of us and saying, "This isn't a good time for Lynn and me, but God is leading us to do something **uncomfortably affordable.**

-Friends, **everything** worthwhile takes courage, takes financial sacrifice, and takes time **you don't think you have.** The mission of Jesus is no different—and I want to **shamelessly** challenge you to obey God with your giving, your serving, and give your best—not your leftovers.

-The key is—**doing this together!** Try it by yourself—and you'll get beaten down, blocked and discouraged. But **together—in the power of the Spirit?** Over time, 120 people turned the world upside down! And that's what Jesus has called **His** Church, **His** people to! That, friends, is **our** calling! I don't want to wimp out. I don't want to circle the wagons and make The Olive Branch about shuffling believers from church to church. I don't want to hide in my house and look for a more comfortable recliner and keep watch over my RSPs by night. I want to make a maximum impact for the glory of God—to spread his goodness **everywhere! Today,** we start another five years, and I'd like nothing more than for **all** of us to do that together!