

**I. Introduction**

A. A very special welcome to all of those who are joining us at the Crossroads campus this weekend. Of course the welcome extends to everyone at HP and The 01, but today is the first official day at Crossroads. We had a soft launch there a couple months ago. We are now officially up and running. God bless you. I was just there and will head back there for the celebration.

B. For those of you who are new to Christ Church, we are inching our way through the Gospel of Luke – one of the four accounts of the life of Jesus that we find in the New Testament. And we’ve just come to this section where something big happens – although it’s something that you might miss if you weren’t looking for it. Here, for the first time, Jesus gives away part of the assignment; Jesus deploys others to the front lines in his effort to advance the Kingdom of God to love people, extend grace, offer forgiveness of sins and eternal life, and push back the night.

C. When the Bible opens – Genesis 1 & 2 – everything is going well. And when we look ahead to the end – Revelation 20 and 21 – everything is going well. Between those book-ends, things are messy. Evil perverts and destroys. Jesus – who is God, His birth in the manger does not mark the beginning of his life, it’s simply when he also became a man. He has always existed as God. His birth marks the time when He added humanity to deity so that he could walk among us: teaching, loving, serving as an example, dying in our place so that we can be forgiven, and launching a revolution – which is where we are at now: bringing love and grace and hope, bringing back the will of God.

D. Jesus and the biblical writers tend to package all of this good under the banner of “the kingdom of God.” It’s a big idea – a very important idea. In this series I am describing Christ’s plan as nothing less than a revolution, and we’re exploring a bit of what it looks like and the role we are invited to play.

**II. Before I go any further, let me note that the Revolution has already done a lot of good.**

A. It’s far from over. This world is still a mess. We face lots of challenges. There is a lot wrong. There is a lot of injustice and suffering out there. Some of you are living in that right now. Be assured that one day God will make it all right. His Kingdom will come in its fullness. But – though the Revolution is far from complete, it’s worth noting how much good Jesus has already done.

B. From time to time I go on a rant in an effort to help people see that Jesus is the greatest person who ever lived: the most influential, the most important. This is not hard to prove. After all:

1. More people follow Jesus than anyone else. He does not have a Facebook page or a Twitter account, but if he did, it would be the biggest ever.
2. And more books have been written about him than have been written about anyone else.
3. More music has been written in his honor than for anyone else.
4. Most hold that the ethical system he gave us is the greatest anywhere.

C. Jesus is the most influential, most significant person every born. Well, there is parallel point here that I seldom develop: Jesus is not only the most significant – most important and greatest – person; He is also the one who has done the most good for the world. After all:

1. It's his views and example that inspired others to start hospitals, orphanages and women's care shelters – which is why so many have names like Saint Mark's, Saint Jude's, the Red Cross or the Salvation Army.
2. It was his teaching and example that led his followers to champion higher education and the life of the mind.<sup>1</sup>
3. It was the Christian understanding of the world – the Judeo-Christian worldview – that gave birth to science. Those who thought that the world was God were not willing to submit it to experiments. Those who thought it was worthless didn't see any value in studying it. It was those who believed in an orderly world – where the creation could help you understand the creator – that kept looking and asking questions.

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<sup>1</sup> There were some academies and institutions in Europe founded by Greek philosophers, but higher education as we know it, especially in the United States, was a Cristian endeavor. With the exception of The University of Pennsylvania, the first 30 colleges in the US – Harvard, William and Mary, Yale, Princeton, Brown, etc. – were all started to train pastors, the Bible was essentially the curriculum and the funding came from churches. As late at the late 19<sup>th</sup> century even the state schools had pastors at Presidents.

4. It's also not hard to make the case that democracy finds its roots in the Christ's views of human dignity – a point I develop in my notes should you care to go online and read more.<sup>2</sup>

D. In *It's a Wonderful Life*, we get a glimpse of how different – and dark – things would be if George Bailey hadn't been born. Clarence gets special permission to show George (Jimmy Stewart) how much better things are because he was born. Well, that's nothing compared to what this world would be like without Jesus. We cannot imagine how dark it would be.

1. Humility wasn't seen as a virtue before Jesus, it was seen as weakness. The great, noble person was one who sought power and advanced their own name. The idea of serving others was not valued.<sup>3</sup>

2. It's unclear whether Europe would not have climbed out of the Dark Ages without the followers of Christ who clung to the life of the mind, loved others and created the pockets of flourishing that gradually won the day.<sup>4</sup>

3. I've already hinted at the huge non-profit network in this country – which was not only launched and often still run by people of faith, but which rests on ideas of human dignity and service that are traced back to Christ. And you get a sense of this when you travel throughout Europe, Asia, Africa, former Soviet bloc countries and either do not see this kind of work being done, or you see it being done almost exclusively by Christians.

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<sup>2</sup> When I went to college, missionaries were despised as heavy-handed colonialists when ran rough-shod over native cultures. But the more we learn the more that view has been withdrawn in favor of the view that Christian missionaries were thoughtful people who brought food, education, medical aid and provided safe-guards for the weak. Recently it has been established that missionaries also spread (albeit somewhat intentionally) democracy. See Andrea Palpant Dilley, "The Surprising Discovery About Those Colonialist," (*Christianity Today*), January 8, 2014).

<sup>3</sup> In *Humilitas*, by John Dickson, (Zondervan, 2011) Dickson notes that he served alongside a number of European scholars charged with finding out how humility went from being despised to being embraced, all in a short period of time. Dickson says, it was obvious to all of the ancient historians working on this project, that the reason was Jesus Christ. He went on to note it was less what Christ taught on the topic than how he lived and, subsequently, his followers convictions that the greatest person to ever live had been humble and modeled kindness and service.

<sup>4</sup> In Thomas Cahill's book, *How the Irish Saved Civilization* (Anchor, 1996), he credits Irish monasteries with protecting literacy and learning and subsequently lifting Europeans out of the darkness it has fallen into.

4. I can go on: the whole idea of human dignity is grounded in the belief that we have value because we've been made in God's image;<sup>5</sup> and the great Reformers of the last 2,000 years – and by this I not only mean Gandhi, King, Mandela and Mother Teresa – but also thousands of others, almost always point to Jesus as their model and inspiration.

E. One of the challenges we face today is that we do not appreciate how much good Jesus has already done. How much better things are because of his influence.<sup>6</sup>

F. The Revolution is far from over – and as I noted last week, we cannot get it done on our own, we await his return for the big breakthroughs. But, He has pointed the way and invited us a chance to be part of this work.

G. In this series – Revolution – we are exploring what Jesus did and what we are called to. Today I want to clarify the assignment, because I believe it's bigger and broader than you think. And because it's very helpful to understand the assignment. In college my roommate once really messed up an exam because he didn't read the directions carefully. For some reason he thought that he only had to answer one of the essay questions, not both of them. It's hard to do well when you misunderstand the assignment.

H. Today we get a bit more context for what is expected.

III. If you have a Bible – or some sort of electronic gadget with a Bible app – you can follow along with me. We are in Luke 9.

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<sup>5</sup> There is a new discovery that is rocking certain academic circles. It's the finding that democracy was spread by missionaries

<sup>6</sup> Not only do we not understand how much better things are because of Jesus, we also profoundly misunderstand what would happen if we continue to move away from it. We have circled back to the thinking that was prevalent at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> and beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup>. At that time many were celebrating the "end of religion" and talking about how wonderful things would be as people embraced reason alone and science improved our world. Frederick Nietzsche was one of the few who said that as the West gets rid of God – and the residual Christian ethic and influence dies out – it will move in a very different direction. Nietzsche argued that only power would matter and predicted that the 20<sup>th</sup> century would be a blood bath. It was.

A. Last week we read about Jesus sending the 12 out on a training mission. Today we read about the feeding of the 5,000. This is followed by Peter's great confession, the Transfiguration and more. We also know from the parallel passage in Matthew, that this is right about the time that John the Baptist was beheaded.<sup>7</sup> There is a lot going on. Let's walk through the passage that was read for you at the beginning of the service: Luke 9.

#### IV. Luke 9:10-

A. V10: When the apostles<sup>8</sup> returned, they reported to Jesus what they had done.

1. If you look, you see that there was a clear development plan in place: step one was when he called them – that was back in Luke 5; step two was the training they received from him; step three is when he sends them out on their first mission (that was last week's text: Luke 9:1-9); step four is their debrief – which sort of happens today (as we will see, it's interrupted); step five turns up in Luke 10, where Jesus sends the 12 out with a bunch of others. And the final step is the Great Commission. The last words Jesus spoke before he ascended up into heaven serve as marching orders for all of us. They are recorded in Matthew 28:18-20.<sup>9</sup> He is clearly developing them to take over.

2. So, He sent them out. Here they are coming back. It's time to debrief. If their first preaching experience was anything like mine this is necessary. "Well, OK, that was...interesting... long, confusing, heretical."

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<sup>7</sup> See Matt. 14

<sup>8</sup> Previously they had been called "the Twelve" or "disciples." Here for the first time they are called Apostles, which **in** this setting means someone commissioned by Jesus to

<sup>9</sup> See also 2 Timothy 2:2 for Paul's comments on the plan.

3. The other day I was reading about John Ortberg's first preaching experiences, where he kept passing out. I also read about another one who preached his sermon on this text, and he opened by pounding on the pulpit and saying, "Jesus once fed 2 people with 5,000 fish and 2,000 loaves of bread. How many of you could do that?" And when people started raising their hands, he realized what he'd done and quit. They encouraged him to try again. The next week he came back and started the same way – by pounding on the pulpit, only this time he got it right. "Jesus once fed 5,000 men with five loaves of bread and two fish. How many of you could do that?" One man stood up and said he could. The young preacher was incredulous, but the man said, "I'd just use some of the fish left over from last week."

**B. V10: When the apostles returned, they reported to Jesus what they had done. Then he took them with him and they withdrew by themselves to a town called Bethsaida**

1. The account of the Feeding of the Five Thousand appears in all four Gospels. Each describes the setting a bit differently. No one gives an exact address or GPS coordinates. But by triangulating them it's clear that this is an area in the Golan Heights (northwestern Israel), near the Sea of Galilee.

2. Jesus has taken them there for a bit of R&R after their first mission. They are there to go through a SWOT analysis.

**C. But, V11: But the crowds learned about it and followed him.**

1. People want to get close to Jesus because – remember - He is amazing! He is not only full of grace, wisdom and insight, he can heal the sick and raise the dead. He can overcome evil and death. And after this they will try to stay close by because he can feed them as well<sup>10</sup>

2. When I was a college pastor I was jealous of Jesus's abilities to easily draw crowds. We did all kinds of things but could seldom gain student's interest. And about the only thing I could think of that might work that I could do was offer free beer – which we did not do for obvious reasons. I share that to note: Jesus always had a crowd of people trying to get close to him.

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<sup>10</sup> It is hard to fully appreciate how helpful Jesus's abilities would be. We live in a world of doctors and surplus food. They did not!

3. So, even though He and his disciples get in a boat and sail four hours to the other side, the people watch where they go and walk the lake – the Sea of Galilee is not a Sea, it's a relatively small lake – the crowds follow Jesus.

4. How did he respond? Differently than I would!

**D. V11B: He welcomed them and spoke to them about the kingdom of God**

1. He is gracious and he uses this opportunity to talk more about the kingdom of God, which is what he is trying to unfold.

**E. Still with V11B: He welcomed them and spoke to them about the kingdom of God, and healed those who needed healing. V12: Late in the afternoon the Twelve came to him and said, “Send the crowd away so they can go to the surrounding villages and countryside and find food and lodging, because we are in a remote place here.”**

1. In some of the parallel passages it appears more like they wanted to relax. Here it reads more like they were worried about the need crowd's need for food and shelter.

**F. <sup>13</sup> Jesus replied, “You give them something to eat.”**

1. The disciples (apostles) are either: wanting some down time for themselves; or wanting to let the people get home so they can eat and sleep; or they do not want the hassle and responsibility of caring for crowd; or they are worried that they will not get enough to eat as it is. Whatever the case, Jesus does something surprising. He tells them to feed the people.

**G. V13 Jesus replied, “Give them something to eat. They answered, “We have only five loaves of bread and two fish—unless we go and buy food for all this crowd.” <sup>14</sup> (About five thousand men were there.)**

1. We know from John 6 that they got the food from a young boy who had brought his lunch – which was not two big salmon fillets, but something more like a couple sardines. And the loaves of bread are about the size of Twinkies and made from cheap flour.

2. We know from Matthew's account (14:21) that in addition to the 5,000 men, there were women and children as well, which suggests that the real number was somewhere between 10 and 20K.<sup>11</sup>

3. Finally, we also know from John's account that the cost of feeding them was 200 denarii, which would be about 8 months wages for one person – so a fair bit of money.<sup>12</sup>

H. V14B: **But he said to his disciples, “Have them sit down in groups of about fifty each.” The disciples did so, and everyone sat down. Taking the five loaves and the two fish and looking up to heaven, he gave thanks and broke them. Then he gave them to the disciples to distribute to the people. They all ate and were satisfied, and the disciples picked up twelve basketfuls of broken pieces that were left over.**

V. So, what are we supposed to learn here? The Feeding of the 5,000 is a big deal.<sup>13</sup> It's the only miracle included in all four Gospels and for a while the image of five loaves and two fish was used as a logo for Christians. For instance, we see it as graffiti on the walls in the catacombs.<sup>14</sup> This is an important event. What are we supposed to learn here?

A. Some say this is a lesson on sharing.

1. Not everyone thinks Jesus multiplied food. Some think he simply persuaded people to share – which in some settings is a bit of a miracle. They think that Jesus not only used the boy's lunch, he also used his example to shame or encourage them to dig into their own picnic baskets.

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<sup>11</sup> The word here suggests 5,000 men. Because women tend to be more attuned to spiritual things, some have suggested that if there were 5,000 men there were probably 10K women and 10K children. We do not know and it doesn't matter. Whether he is feeding 10K or 25K, a miracle needs to occur.

<sup>12</sup> See John 6:1-14

<sup>13</sup> Do not confuse the Feeding of the Five Thousand with the feeding of the Four Thousand – a different account found in Matthew 15:21-39. There are a number of significant differences between these two that make it clear that they were separate events. For a record of the three other accounts of the Feeding of the Five Thousand, see: Mt. 14:13f; Mk 6: 30f; and Jn 6:1f.

<sup>14</sup> Floor mosaics in Asia Minor, the Trinity sarcophagus in the Lateran Museum in Rome and the representation in the Catacombs of Domitilla are among examples of places featuring the five loaves and two fish as a symbol of the Christian faith. (David Lyle Jeffrey, *Luke: Brazos Theological Commentary on the Bible* (Baker Publishing, 2012), p. 137.

2. This is not what the text says – nor does it make much sense. The people there are so amazed at what Jesus did that they try to crown him king and he has to duck and run. It seems unlikely that getting them to share would lead to this kind of response.<sup>15</sup> In fact, the idea that they'd make him king because he taught them to share sounds like a Monty Python sketch. "He taught me to share. Let's make him King!" (Others: King! King! King!) The text does not suggest that Jesus simply taught them to share.

B. Some say Jesus simply taught them to share. Others claim that Jesus was simply an illusionist – a first century David Copperfield doing his Vegas act in Israel.<sup>16</sup>

1. I've read supposedly scholarly accounts where people describe how Jesus wore a big robe so he could block the bucket brigade of disciples behind him who had formed a food line from a cave where they had stockpiled food and where feeding it into the back of Jesus's robe so he could keep pulling fish out of his sleeve. A few pages later these same writers are claiming that Jesus is a great ethical teacher. And I'm thinking, "Dude, didn't you read your own book? You just said he was a con man."<sup>17</sup> I am not making this up. I'd have an easier time with this if these same people said Jesus was a bad man, because clearly he is misleading everyone. But many of these same writers then go on to claim that Jesus was a great ethical teacher and nothing more.<sup>18</sup>

C. Some spend their time trying to explain away the miracle. Others focus on various details in the text. For instance:

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<sup>15</sup> If Jesus were king – and would / could guarantee them great health and plenty of food, he has addressed most all of their problems. Some suggest that the people were after the ultimate welfare state.

<sup>16</sup> There are many attacks on this miracle because, while it's relatively easy to explain certain types of healings – i.e., suggest that the changes were all psychological or the whole thing was staged – it's harder to explain the multiplication of food. That is a miracle of creation.

<sup>17</sup> Another problem with this view is the disciples. It's clear from the way they all suffer and die for Christ that they believe He was God. They would not believe this if they had been in on a bunch of magic acts.

<sup>18</sup> One scholar – and I have to use air quotes here because I do not think there is anything particularly scholarly about this. I buy in with Peter Kreeft who says, some things are so ridiculous that only a PhD would buy into them. One scholar has argued that Jesus had stockpiled a cave full of bread and fish and then had the disciples form a bucket brigade behind his robe so he can keep pulling fish out of his sleeve. These people – the Jesus Seminar folks – argue that Jesus is just a great ethical teacher, therefore all he was doing is tricking them into thinking he was more than that.

1. Some drill down on the amount of food left. In Luke it's 12 loaves of bread, which they speculate is designed to remind us of the twelve tribes of Israel and the priority the Jews enjoy in God's plan.<sup>19</sup>
2. Some go into some length about the fact that this is a different kind of miracle than the others – one of creation not transformation.
3. Still others see links between what Jesus does here (especially the way he took the bread and then looked to heaven, giving thanks) with the Last Supper to follow.<sup>20</sup>
4. Others point back to II Kings where Elisha fed 100 with very little food and had some left over,<sup>21</sup> or further back to God providing manna for the slaves in the Egyptian desert.<sup>22</sup>

VI. There is plenty to ponder here. But let me suggest that one of the goals of Bible Study is to keep the main thing the main thing. It would be a big miss if we didn't see at least three things

A. First, Jesus is God.

1. This is the big idea of the book – at least that is what Luke says! In Luke 1 he explains that he is writing so that Theophilus (and others) can believe – can have confidence in the claims of Christ.

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<sup>19</sup> Likewise, in one of the other accounts it's seven loaves and they argue this is because there were seven Gentile nations wrongly living in the Promised Land and destined to live off of the scraps left over from God's care of Israel.

<sup>20</sup> The way John describes things in John 6 suggests that there is some merit to this.

<sup>21</sup> 2 Kings 4:42-44.

<sup>22</sup> Some also use this passage – where Jesus fed everyone, not bothering to sort out true disciples from those who were not – to argue that we feed everyone.

2. The miracles Jesus does – feeding the 5,000 and others – are not there to dazzle us. He could have done that. He could have flown into Israel like Superman, zapping bad guys like some first century super hero. He does not. For starters, miracles seldom change hearts (people doubt them.) Besides, it's not his style. As I noted last week, Jesus doesn't do tricks to impress people. It isn't "Watch me bend this spoon," or "pick a card, any card but don't tell me what it is." Instead, he uses his powers to help others. He restores things – if only for a while – to the way they are supposed to be. However, taken as a whole, Luke is building the case that Jesus is more than just a rabbi and the miracles Christ does are part of that argument. The fact that Jesus has power over the material world (and evil, death, the weather, etc.) is evidence that we can and should believe his remarkable claims.

B. Second, we are called to acts of compassion

1. We are called to address people's needs – not just their spiritual needs but their physical needs as well.

2. There are other places I'd go first to make this point, such as Matthew 25<sup>23</sup> or the cultural mandate back in Genesis 1. Or the Hebrew understanding of righteous – which is a lot bigger than justice or virtue, it speaks of a right ordering of all relationships.<sup>24</sup> But the Feeding of the Five Thousand does highlight the fact that Jesus takes action to relieve the suffering of the people. They were hungry so he fed them. I would submit to you that we can do no less.

3. So while we are here, let me announce, Operation Feed 5,000. There are 85 food banks in Lake County. Fifty-four percent recently said they have to choose between buying enough food and paying rent. Let's work together to fill the food banks this month. We can do this. Please go to our web site, download the list of the kinds of foods food banks need most, and then bring it with you either of the next two weeks – whatever campus you attend. We will take care of distributing it throughout the food banks in Lake County.

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<sup>23</sup> See Matthew 25:31-46

<sup>24</sup> See Skye Jethani, *Futurville: Discover Your Purpose For Today by Reimagining Tomorrow* (Thomas Nelson, 2013), p. 118.

C. Finally, the third thing I want to highlight – and this is one I called out last week as well – is this: the mission we are recruited to join, the revolution Christ started is both / and. Jesus is concerned about both the spiritual and the physical (emotional and social) needs of people.

1. Last week I mentioned that the “and” was important in verse Luke 9:1 - **When Jesus had called the Twelve together, he gave them power and authority to drive out all demons and to cure diseases** – and I said I’d be coming back to it. I argued that a bird needs two wings to fly: Proclaim the Good News and Engage in Good Works, evangelism and social action. I want to reinforce that here.

VII. Here is what you need to know:

A. Everyone and everything matters to God and his kingdom will restore it all. He intends to bring order, to promote flourishing, to care for all of the needs of people and creation, Good News and good works.

B. That means that our work today – our contribution to the revolution – needs to include both the Great Commission (Mt. 28) and the Great Commandment (Mark 9?).

1. If you do not understand what is meant by “the Good News” – there is a sense in which it includes all that Jesus taught, but is especially focused on what he did – chiefly, paying the penalty of our sin in death so that we can be forgiven and gain eternal life.

2. We do not look for ways to serve God or advance his kingdom so that we can gain eternal life, we serve out of the joy that we have been granted eternal life.

C. Please note: some say that the eternal nature of salvation means that evangelism outweighs social action, because social action focuses on temporal concerns. And there is something to that.

1. We list the two aspects of our mission in a particular order: Proclaim the Good News and Engage in Good Work.<sup>25</sup> We do not do this on purpose, not because the spiritual is more important than the physical but because:

- a) The eternal is more important than the temporal
- b) No one else has is sharing the Gospel. (Lots of people of other faiths or no faith are helping meet the physical needs of others, but Christ followers alone are the ones sharing about Christ);
- c) And because, if you want to recruit people to help you serve the needy and broken, it helps if they have their heart changed by Christ

2. However, make no mistake, we are called to both. The assignment from God includes both. The example of Jesus models both.

D. Some churches get this wrong because they only focus on physical needs or social concerns. What they are doing matters and should be applauded, but it's not the whole assignment. Other churches do the opposite. It's all proclamation but no social action.<sup>26</sup> Again, please hear me: what they are doing matters, it's wonderful. But it's not the whole assignment.<sup>27</sup>

VIII. Let me pause to acknowledge that lots of good things are happening on this front.

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<sup>25</sup> In *Christian Mission in the Modern World*, John Stott has written quite extensively on the mission of the church and the temptation common to many to try to make social justice either subordinate or superior to evangelism. He argues that the idea that social action is superior to evangelism is clearly out of step with the New Testament, and then argues so is the idea that it is inferior, pointing out that this would make the call to social action a sugar pill necessary for to get people to embrace the Gospel – as if the Gospel wasn't strong enough on its own! Stott concludes that social action and evangelism “belong to each other and yet are independent of each other. Each stands on its own feet in its own right alongside the other. Neither is a means to the other, or even a manifestation of the other. For each is an end in itself.” (John Stott and Ajith Fernando, *Christian Mission in the Modern World* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2008),

<sup>26</sup> In recent history we have plenty of examples of this. What are sometimes referred to as Mainline or Old line Protestant Churches have tended to be all about Social Justice. They argue that Jesus was a great teacher and the premier moral and ethical reformer. Consequently the call to us is to: feed the hungry and care for the poor. Period, full stop.

<sup>27</sup> It is possible that some Christians are specifically called – and gifted – to one over the other. But churches should be doing both.

A. One of the great joys of working at a church is that I get to see the good things many people do without these things being announced.

1. I see guys serving here, who were led to Christ while in the local jail by those working in our prison ministry. They have stood alongside these new believers, are helping them get their feet on the ground and have them plugged in here, serving and inviting others. That is a yea God moment.

2. This past week I was sent an article from the *Chicago Tribune* profiling some men in the church who are involved with the HOGS ministry – the Hands of God Serving – volunteer for home repair projects for single moms and others in need.

3. I spoke with a guy this week who told me that last week he led five different people to faith by sharing in his office.

4. This past year we built a school in Ghana. Next weekend the High School group – which regularly volunteers at Bernies Book Bank and ?? is working at Feed My Starving Children.

B. I'm not implying that lots of good things are not happening right now – there is, both inside and outside the walls of the church. But I do want to say there is a revolution going on, and its big and we are invited – and encouraged – to do all we can, because as we do everyone wins.

IX. Men and women – what God will do in your life if you let him is bigger than you can imagine. I invite you to join the revolution. To get into the game now, by sharing the love of God in both word and deed. This is our highest calling.