

know its sheep. He believes the church is all about making disciples, in this case in Denver, CO. Hugh is from the Oregon where he originally became a Christian and got involved in evangelism. And he went on to try and establish a church, but like so many other people of his age, he got discouraged about details of church ministry and didn't feel like they were actually making disciples. Some years later, while still working at trying to help church planters, he came across some people in an Irish pub in New York City who didn't have much good to say about the church, but who got really excited about what Hugh had to say about Jesus and his kingdom. In fact this experience got him so fired up that he and his wife decided to move to Denver Colorado in order to start a community of faith. He got a job painting houses and they just started befriending neighbours and acquaintances by inviting them over for meals and helping them in any way they could. Once in a while they would have a party to celebrate an occasion. Once they did this on St. Patrick's Day. On that particular occasion, Hugh and his wife, shared Irish sayings, some Scripture verses along the same line, and the story of St. Patrick. People were so amazed and impressed they wondered if this was church. They didn't call it church, but just a faith community. Soon people came to meet regularly in their home to learn more about the Bible and what it meant to be a follower of Jesus. And out of that experience has grown a community that is serious about making disciples which is called, Adullam.

It was very refreshing to listen to someone who is serious about seeking to reach out to people with the Gospel and is effective in doing so. And it was inspiring to hear how he wants to help churches be effective in their mission of reaching out with the Gospel as well in these days.

A couple of weeks ago we talked about change and how important it is for us to be willing, as followers of Jesus, to embrace change. We need to affirm those things that do not change, like God's Word and the Gospel -- along with all that it includes -- but we also need to acknowledge that it's necessary to adapt the communication of the Gospel to the changing cultures of people. When missionaries go to another culture to share the Gospel they need to be sensitive to the ways of those people, need to understand their language, and speak to them in ways that make sense. That's what it means to be incarnational -- to identify with the people we are seeking to reach in the same way that Jesus came to us from heaven and put himself into a body just like us. (Incarnational means to become flesh.)

It doesn't take much to realize that our own culture has changed a lot in the last 20 – 40 years. There used to be a time when most everyone in our Canadian culture was associated with Christianity in some way. There was a time church was prominent and everyone understood what we meant when we talked about God, about sin, and about Jesus. We could share the truths of the Gospel quite directly through the Four Spiritual Laws, or Evangelism Explosion, or the Roman Road, and so on.

But today's generation is not inclined to listen and respond to sermons that are preached at them. For one thing the church is no longer central to our society like it used to be. It's not likely that you're going to get very far by trying to convince people with arguments for the existence of God or the Gospel. The typical response is likely to be that everyone is entitled to their own beliefs and that we should be tolerant of others who have different beliefs. So the way we do evangelism today in general needs to be quite different than the way we used to do it. Today we need to take a non-confrontational approach. Instead our efforts at evangelism need to begin with relationship. More than ever *people don't care how much you know until they really know how much you care*. So if we're going to be effective in communicating the Gospel so that people really understand what it is, we need to be willing to build a relationship with people first.

These are some of the ideas that are foundational to how Hugh Halter and his wife are building the church in Colorado. And though Colorado seems like a long ways away, the people of Kitimat are not really a lot different – mainly because we all watch the same television programs and all use the same kinds of cell phones, etc. We live in a global village.

What I would like to do with you this morning is to share some transferable principles about how to share the Gospel with people here in Canada and Kitimat, based on what the Bible teaches in stories like this one in John 4 and also based on the changes that are happening in our culture using Hugh Halter as a reference.

In answer to the question of how the Mountain View Alliance church can be more effective in sharing the Gospel with people in Kitimat, here are some principles to keep in mind:

1. **Think missionally.** You would think this would come quite naturally to us who are part of this church and denomination called, the Christian and Missionary Alliance. From the very beginning it was the truth of the

Gospel that captured the heart of Albert Simpson and made him want to reach the world with this message. It was the truth of the Gospel that caused him to move into a theatre in Louisville, Kentucky way back in the later 1800s. Having come to experience fullness of life in Jesus Christ both for his spirit and his body he went on to New York City with that same passion to reach the whole world with the Gospel. For the sake of the communication of the Gospel, Albert Simpson established a Missionary Training Institute, the first of its kind in North America, and sent out missionaries to places like the Congo in Africa and to China and other parts of Asia.

Today there is a lot of talk about *what it means to be a missional church* but it's not always understood what is meant by that. Fundamentally, a missional church is a church that is passionate about reaching its community with the Good News of Jesus and His kingdom. It is about going out to where the people are instead of expecting them to come to the church. It is becoming the hands and feet of Jesus in demonstrating His love in word and deed. It is Christians and those of His church becoming incarnational or being willing to truly live among their neighbours in order to reach them with the Good News that comes from God.

Being missional means

- that you want to reach out to people in your community with the good news about Jesus.
- you are convinced about the uniqueness of the Gospel and the need that your friends and neighbours have for the Lord
- giving yourself away.
- moving out of your own comfort zone toward people who are in another world, another zone, another culture – just like Jesus did with this Samaritan woman. Jesus didn't have to go through Samaria. In fact, most often, the Jews went around this area to travel from the north to the south. And Jesus didn't have to talk with her. He could have done what Jews usually did.
- being missional means genuinely caring about people like God does. These days it's not so much about evangelism and conversion as it is about loving people to Jesus. And this isn't particularly easy.
- It may mean giving up our time, our houses, our food, and our own interests. As Hugh Halter says, *I'm a bit of an introvert. I don't like to give up my time. I like being by myself. I like myself. I like to spend time*

with me. But being missional means becoming unselfish about my life. And by God's grace, we can do this.

- 2. Become a Friend.** One of the first things that being missional and loving people incarnationally means is to seek their friendship. Hugh compared it to what you would do if you were going to try to establish a church in another foreign city. Let's say it was Barcelona or Paris. To start with, you would set up your living quarters and then try and get a job. It would be important to try to learn the language of the people and to get to know their interests. The best way to reach people is to seek to become their friends. *But how do you know when a person is your friend?* Hugh says a friend is someone who invites you to be their friend. Further he suggests that this doesn't happen quickly. It takes 12 – 14 months to become a true friend of someone else.

One of the things I've appreciated seeing among many of you is the connection you have with so many other people in the community. Many of you have a lot of friends outside the church community. But it may be that you have to take those relationships to the next level in order to introduce them to Jesus. For Hugh and his wife, it meant opening their home to have meals with people. It meant helping them with their personal projects and their needs. It meant inviting people in the community to come over for a BBQ or a neighbourhood party. And of course, you can imagine that it doesn't take long for conversations about spiritual matters to emerge in that kind of relationship.

I know this is different for most of us. Without realizing it, we tend to be exclusive toward others because we think in terms of *them and us*. In order to be more effective missionally we have to think more inclusively – that there is a sense in which we are all sojourners on the journey of faith – that others really are trying to find God too.

- 3. Participation in the Community of faith.** The last thing about being a missional church is that there comes a time when people come to realize that God's way of faith is through Jesus Christ. Believers in Christ meet regularly for communion, for fellowship, and for instruction in God's Word. And it is there that people are introduced to faith in Jesus Christ and what it means to follow Him. People are invited to come even though they may not yet have crossed the line of faith and opened their hearts to Christ. But they come because of the love and friendship that

has been established earlier. But always it is explained that Communion is for those who have come to put their faith in Christ.

It's like what we do here on Sunday mornings. But it doesn't stay with what we do here. Because the church exists to be missional, constant attention is given to how we are intentionally working at forming friendships and making disciples. Actually in the case of Adullam, the community may consist of a variety of groups that meet separately in people's homes during the week. There it is that the elements of church take place – worship, communion, fellowship, teaching from God's Word. From time to time all the groups meet in one place to celebrate community in a larger way – just like we do on Sunday mornings. But the really good news in all of this is that people who never considered being Christians are coming to faith in Christ.

I realize what I've described for you today is a long ways from where we live in some ways. We are an established church of many years in which some great things are happening. And so much will depend on how the next pastor works with you all to reach out to this community. But the bottom line is that people are thirsty, just like this poor woman in Jesus' day. (Last Sunday I told the story of being in line at Tim Horton's in Langley and how this guy named John and I ended up in a conversation in which he confessed his own thirst for God.)The church is certainly about what we do here on Sundays, but it is about a lot more. It is about taking the Gospel to people in our neighbourhoods and relationships so that they can come to know him too.