**Olga Ling: The making of an evangelist**

It’s her smile that reaches you first.

“Emily!” Olga Ling beams as she waves me over to the COVID-safe queue out the front of her favourite local café. Once inside, she proceeds to order us a small feast of breakfast mains and dessert, and it’s immediately obvious that we are not just here for an interview. We are sharing life together.

As we settle into our meal, I learn why.

The buoyant personality that courses through the petite frame of this Sydney-based international evangelist and Fresh Hope pastor is fuelled by a fire that has been stoked over more than 50 years.

At the age of five, Olga “fell in love with Jesus” through attending church at 6am every day at her Catholic boarding school in her home country of Indonesia. This became twice a day at the age of 12, and by the time she moved to Australia at 29, she had become a woman with a strong Catholic faith, deeply devoted to God and willing to be obedient to Him.

“My sister had already moved to Australia, and after I came to Australia I lived with her,” she tells me. “Her husband’s brother Gary lived with them too, and after two or three months here we married. It was like the Bible said – I have a good plan for you, a good future!”

Almost 20 years later, in April 2000, Olga learned again how true that is.

“I had to have a hysterectomy because I had a large tumour and during the operation I had a cardiac arrest for ten minutes. The doctor said to my husband, ‘When the oxygen doesn’t go to the brain for three minutes, there’s going to be brain damage.’

“But I wake up in ICU and my brain is working!” she shares, her whole body engaged in recounting the moment that changed her life forever. “And two days later I had a dream. I had a vision of a coffin in front of me on the wall. I said, ‘Lord, what is this one?’ In my spirit he said, ‘It’s supposed to be you in there, but by the grace of the Lord I give you another chance to live. Go into the world and preach the Gospel.’ I said, ‘Me?!’ He said, ‘Yes.’ And then I woke up.

“And the Lord said, ‘Open your Bible to Ezekiel 36:26-27’. It said, ‘I will give you a new heart.’ And he said, ‘I’m going to take your heart of stone and I will give you a heart of obedience to me.’

“And I cried and I wept and I know that God’s called me. And he said, ‘Open your Bible again to Matthew 10:8.’ And it said heal the sick and raise the dead. He said, ‘You already got that from me and now your job is to raise the people, heal, and cast out the devil.’”

This life-changing call to preach the Gospel sent Olga to Bible college where she discovered her gift for preaching. Shortly thereafter, she and one of the elders from the church where she served as a worship leader, Joseph Tee, stepped out in faith to found Harvest Indonesian Church.

As we make our way through breakfast dessert (pancakes), I learned that it wasn’t for another seven years that Olga’s first overseas opportunity to preach the Gospel to the world opened up – at a birthday party for a Christian friend!

“I went to Jakarta and my friend wanted to see me. They said, ‘Olga, I heard you are a pastor! It’s my husband’s birthday party and I already invited 200 people – can you come and preach?’

“When I preached, I brought an altar call and they all wept! They all came to Jesus in only one night. The next day they asked for another rally – and so many people came, about 500 the next day. And they made an appointment for me to come next year, to send me from village to village.

“Ten churches invited me, and I was doing a rally every night. My picture was on a billboard and there was even a rally in the market on the street. They closed the street and people would go to the roof, or to a tree to hear me preach! I said, ‘Lord, it looks like Zacchaeus!’”

From there, opportunities opened up through friends and word of mouth for Olga to preach the Gospel to Indonesians living in Holland, New York, Boston, Philadelphia, New Hampshire, New Jersey and Athens.

And while she has been unable to travel this year because of COVID-19, the preaching opportunities have continued online. She is also volunteering to wrap Christmas presents with the Cancer Council as a way of connecting with more people – and unsurprisingly she always has the longest queue.

“For me in my heart, every day when I wake up, I say, ‘Jesus, one more soul for you. I’m 68 next year and in my old age I’m going to bring so many people to come to you.’ That’s my goal. I don’t have any other motivation. I don’t care about the reward – I just say, ‘Thank you Jesus!’ I’m so honoured God chose me.”