

## You Give Them Something to Eat!

A sermon preached by Ted Atkinson, Minister, Oxford Presbyterian Church, Oxford, PA on the 9th Sunday after Pentecost, August 5, 1990. Scripture Lessons: Exodus 12:1-14; Psalm 143:1-10; Romans 8:31-39; Matthew 14:13-21

**IN THE NAME OF THE FATHER AND OF THE SON AND OF THE HOLY SPIRIT. AMEN.**

When Jesus heard of the violent death of John the Baptist at the hands of Herod he withdrew to a solitary place but the crowds went looking for him. He went on vacation, just like my family is going on vacation this afternoon. But just when Jesus got settled into his get-a-way he saw the crowds coming to mess up his vacation. He must have felt a twinge of mixed emotions; the desire for solitude and rest, on the one hand, and the desire to minister to hurting people.

Now let me get this straight. I'm not Jesus. I'm going on vacation but you'll be covered very well with Dr. Murray and Ted Ludwig. So, unlike Jesus, if I see a multitude of hurting and hungry people following me over to Camp Donegal I'm going to take off running into the woods.

But Jesus couldn't look at needy people without feeling compassion. People sensed his love for them. The word "compassion" in the original language means 'to suffer with- to be identified with the anguish and woe of another.' Whenever Jesus saw need or sensed sorrow, he joined his heart to the suffering person. He felt the pain of the sufferer. He felt grief whenever he met a sorrowing person. He felt deeply the isolation and alienation of the leper, the hated tax-collectors, the abused woman, the grieving widow, the ignored child. And on the cross he suffered for and with us all. He took upon himself all the worlds suffering and sin and sickness. I can hardly imagine his anguish. But, because he lives, I believe that he continues to suffer with every sick or sad or sinning person he meets. If we

have the spirit of Christ, we too will suffer with those around us. We'll see with the eyes of Christ and feel with the heart of Christ.

1. All day Jesus ministered to these men and women and children. There are 500 members of our congregation some of whom I haven't even met yet—after nearly five years. But Jesus ministered to over 5000 people, the number of the total population of a small town. He ministered all through the morning and afternoon until it was getting late. The sun was setting in the West. The shadows grew longer. The temperature fell. Soon it would be dark. They had no food and miles to go to the closest convenient store. The disciples must have been as tired as Jesus. They must've also been getting hungry. So they came to Jesus and said, "Send the people away to get something to eat."

"Send the people away." That's what I'm afraid we're going to say to Christ as we go through our rebuilding process. We'll come to Christ in prayer and say, "The world out there is hungry. The needs of the world are so great. But what can we do? We have our own needs and our resources are so meager. We have only about 1.8 million dollars and our new church building may cost over 3 million dollars. And, now Lord, our denomination wants us to contribute to the Bicentennial Fund over a three year period. In addition to that, our pastor wants us to support the CROP walk in October—you know - the one that's going to be held on October 14. He wants us to raise money for hungry people around the world and in this town. Lord, the needs are so great and our resources are so few. Send them away to fend for themselves."

I have a tendency to look, first, at my own needs. I think that's natural. I don't like it when Kay says, "Let's get a dish of ice cream and we'll share it."

I want it all. One of our problems as American Christians is that our own needs are never entirely met. Our problem as American Christians is that what we thought were luxuries 25 years ago we need think are basic needs. And we all have age-old basic needs. We have a need to come to church to be forgiven, to be comforted, to be assured, to experience fellowship. And sometimes we feel that there's not enough forgiveness, comfort, assurance and fellowship to satisfy ourselves let alone the world. The great temptation is to feel that we can't minister adequately to others as long as we ourselves have unmet needs.

So often the first line item to be cut in a church budget is mission giving to those outside the church. We have limited resources and the needs of the world are so great that the little we can give won't make a dent. What can our limited resources accomplish in the face of the world's great needs so let's forget the needs of the 5000? Send them away

2. But Jesus says to his disciples, maybe with a grin on his face, "There's no need to send them away. You give them something to eat!" You! "But all we have is five loaves of bread and two fish."

I imagine that this little cache of food was hidden behind a stone or tree where people couldn't see it. They were just waiting for the crowds to go away so they could enjoy their meagre dinner. After all, it would be impolite to eat in front of all these people.

When you were a child did you ever have the experience of having something like five pretzel sticks and a can of soda- not nearly as much as you'd like but still enough? And just when you thought you were all alone and ready to eat the pretzel sticks a friend comes up and say, "What do you have there? Pretzel sticks? They look good." And you know she'd like for

you to share with her but you think, "Well, there's hardly enough for me, let alone her and who knows who else will come by." So you say to your good friend; "I think I hear your mother calling you."

Adults act that way sometimes. Christians act like that at times. Like the disciples, we have limited resources.

3. "Forget the meagreness of your resources", Christ says. "You give them something to eat. Trust me and place what you have in my hands and I'll multiply your resources."

Does that mean if you give everything to God you'll get rich? No! It does mean that God can accomplish far more than we can think or dream in this world if we place all our meagre, inadequate resources in his hands. That's one of our big problems as American Christians. We believe that Jesus has the power to forgive our sins and heal our hurts but we have a tendency to doubt the power of Jesus to multiply our limited resources to be used for those outside. We believe that Christ can work in the individual heart but we have a tendency to be pessimistic about what can be accomplished in this world through men and women who give their all to Christ?

We're overcome by the overwhelming feeling that the task is too big for us, the resources available to us are too few. When faced with the hunger and need of the world, there are never enough people who care, never enough hands to do the work, never enough money to go round. Our resources are totally inadequate. We might as well eat our own modest lunch, and regretfully close our eyes and minds to the hungry 5000.

The trouble is that this line of reasoning offers us the perfect alibi to ignore the world's needs and to minister only to ourselves.

But when we actually trust Christ and bring our meagre resources to him he multiplies them. I think of the men and women of this church. A year ago, after the fire, some were saying, "What can I do to help rebuild this church. I don't have a lot of money to give. My resources are so meagre but I want to see our church rebuilt." Some said, "I don't have much money but I do have a few organizational and planning skills. What would happen if I placed those skills in the hands of Jesus?" Others said, "I can't contribute a million dollars but I can make apple crisp. I can clean out my garage and donate things for an auction. I can make handicrafts and sell them and contribute the money to the rebuilding of our church."

Others said, "I don't have much but I do have a truck. I have a car. I have an apple press. I have a sound system. I have a voice and I can sing. I have two good hands and a strong back to carry things, to put up tents."

You brought your resources to Jesus and he took them and multiplied them.

What if we were to place in the hands of Jesus all the resources we have every day? Our minds... our athletic abilities... our business acumen... our organizational skills... our artistic abilities? What if we saw our everyday lives and our places of work and play mission fields?

The apostle Paul tells us that God is for us. We are God's chosen people. I wonder if we really believe that. We are God's chosen people. But let's be sure we understand what that means. It means that God has chosen us, not just for the privilege of going to heaven but for the responsibility of being co-workers... to be the channels through which the Risen Christ continues his ministry of healing, saving, and feeding. God has chosen us to be the means through which the whole world will receive God's blessing and salvation.

When we give to Jesus our precious but limited resources... our money... our time... our hearts and minds... our baseball cards and golf-clubs and tennis-rackets and cards and homes and cars and boats... he blesses them and gives them all back to us and says, "Use these things, not just for yourselves, but for the common good. Use these things to let others know and experience my love and my healing power." God did not keep back his own son, but offered him for us all! He gave us his Son- will he not also freely give us all things?

What does it mean when we confess that we are saved by grace through faith in Jesus Christ? Faith isn't just an empty word? It doesn't simply mean to believe that Jesus was born of the Virgin Mary, suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, dead, and buried, descended into hell and rose again from the dead? Faith in Jesus means that we, not only believe these things about him, but, that we actually trust the Risen Christ when he tells us to bring our meagre resources to him... to place them in his hands to bless and to give back to us to distribute to a hungry world.

Let us pray: Thank you for Lord Jesus for stopping to listen to every sick person who called out to you; thank you for healing every sort of sickness there is, for feeding the hungry, for setting men and women free, and for raising the dead. Bless all the people all over the world who are trying to follow your example in the power of your Spirit. Bless those who are taking food to the hungry people, medicine to sick people, proper forms of government to nations which do not have real freedom, and your holy gospel to those who don't know you died for them that they might live for you. Bless them, and all the sick, sad, and lonely people to whom they go, for your name's sake. Amen.