

The Loaves and Fishes

Grace and peace to you from our Lord Jesus Christ...

As I was thinking about my message this week I came across something that said, “*We find ourselves - when we give ourselves away*”... and in Acts 20:35 it says, “*Paul told the people to remember the words that Jesus said, that it is “better to give - than to receive”*”...

If someone were to ask me

You know, it’s been said that the Christian message is ‘old-fashioned’, ‘out of touch’ and ‘not relevant’ for people today... but when people say that to me - I always think to myself, “*when was the Christian message ever relevant to people of any generation?*”... because to be *relevant* means that ‘we can relate to something’... and I’m not sure that, Jesus as a teacher, was trying to *get us to relate* to the world that we live in... instead, Jesus was trying to get us to live in spirit (so that we might be free from the worries and concerns of this world) – that we might look beyond it (and dream bigger)...

And the path that he told us would get us there - (point to the cross) – is found in ‘giving ourselves away’... in sacrificial love... the dying of the self (so that the Spirit can emerge) and live...

And maybe that’s why ‘giving ourselves away’ is so puzzling to some of us (even to those of us who call ourselves Christian)... because the world doesn’t teach us to give... instead the world (that we live in) prides itself with slogans like, “*he who dies with the most toys wins*”...

I might even add that the world that we live in doesn’t expect us to give ourselves away freely – instead it expects us to *grab onto*, and *collect*, and *amass* – so that we might have enough for ourselves...

But the question is, “when do I have enough?” and when can I be generous (as Jesus showed us we should be?)...

Thomas Long, who is a Christian minister and world-renowned preacher, once said that, “*it saddens him to see how unfulfilled many Christians are in their faith*”... and he concludes that *their dissatisfaction is not because of their churches, or their*

pastors, or even the message of Christ – (but their lack of trust in God to live by His Word and to ‘give of themselves’ so that they might be transformed and go deeper with God)... and he likens it to a non-verbal transaction that takes place in the back corners of their mind and hearts that says something like this:

“I’ll take 10 dollars’ worth of Jesus – not enough to make me a fanatic or altar my lifestyle – but just enough to make me feel comfortable... I don’t want to know Jesus enough where it might lead me to love someone with AIDS, or become a missionary... just give me a pound of the supernatural in a brown paper bag – and I’ll take that ‘to go’”...

And then we go (right back) out into the world – and we focus only on ourselves (trying to make our own lives better) but forgetting that the Lord wants us to make the world a better place (with loving and generous hearts) so that those who do not believe can see the love of our Father... and only with a generous heart (which reflects the heart of our Father in Heaven) can we reflect that love in the world... anything less, falls short...

You know, I’ve always found the story that we read this morning from the Gospel of John to be quite interesting... it says that 5000 people came to hear Jesus preach... most likely hoping that Jesus would put something into *their own hands* that day... and what a wonderful experience that must have been to hear the greatest and wisest teacher of all time teach about the Kingdom of God... How moving that experience must have been...

But the story seems to indicate that not everyone was moved... not everyone wanted to hear what Jesus had to say... sure, there were many people who came to see what was in it for them... some wanted to know the fastest and easiest way to Heaven... but few wanted to hear what Jesus taught about giving... or sacrificial love (that is made on behalf of someone who cannot pay you back)...

In fact, the Bible says that after Jesus was finished with one of the greatest sermons ever delivered – only one little boy knew how to respond – and that was by giving all that he had... five loaves and two fishes that his mother most likely packed for him that morning before he was sent off to listen to our Lord preach...

But let's stop for a moment and think about that – 5000 people come to spend the day listening to Jesus preach and only one little boy thought to bring food?...

Of course, not... there were undoubtedly many people who had more food with them than that little boy... I'm sure there were artisans and teachers, shop owners and tax collectors in the crowd... and just like us, they knew that if they were going to spend the day sitting on the grass listening to someone preach - they were going to bring some food (just like we would do at a game, a concert, or an outdoor venue)... food just makes it better...

But when it came to sharing it they couldn't open their hands... privately, I'm sure they wanted to go deeper with God and be more like Jesus (they certainly wanted to be saved)... but the truth was that they weren't spiritually mature enough to loosen the grip they had on their blessings and share it with others... perhaps they believed it was too little to make a difference... and so they convinced themselves that it was okay to give nothing..

And I've always guess that when it came time to take up the offering, I'm sure they all looked around hoping that someone else would take the lead... I'm sure they came up with all sorts of excuses why that day was not a good day to give... perhaps even a few of them were offended that Jesus would even ask...

And then in the distance they saw a young boy giving the disciples all that his mother had packed for him that morning – five loaves of bread and two fishes – and I imagine their hearts just melted... because that little boy was everything they wanted to be – he was generous, he was loving – but most importantly he trusted that what Jesus said was true... that if he gave away what little he had, not only would it bless the people around him – but he would find the Spirit of God dwelling deep within his heart...

And friends, that same wisdom is true for us... none of us here today are without some ability to make a difference in the world... all of us have been blessed with something (whether it be financially or in our giftedness) – and when we give it away freely (just as it was given to us freely) we experience the Spirit of God dwelling in our hearts...

And that is the path that Jesus taught us (with his own death on the cross)... for the spirit to live (the self must die)...

That reminds me of a story I read in a daily devotion (a while back) about a man, who sadly, lost his wife... and in his grief he started to believe that he had nothing left to give... as the story goes, the death of his wife was so painful that he'd often spend most of the day alone crying as he remembered their life together... and every single week all he could find energy to do was to put a bouquet of flowers on her grave... and afterwards, he would speak to the local pastor in town (and they would pray for the man's healing from the pain)...

Well, one day as he was speaking to the pastor the grieving man said, *"I don't have anything else to give in this life!... I feel like I can't go on... and what's more – I feel empty on the inside"...*

But the pastor, who had been listening to the man for two years - gently said, *"I want you to stop bringing those flowers to your wife's graveside... because you have so much more to give this world than you know... instead, I want you to take those flowers to the local hospital... and each time you meet someone new I want you to give them each a flower"...*

Well, to keep a long story short the man decided to take the pastor's advice (and through time discovered that he indeed had so much more to give in this world)... and not only did he meet new friends, share their common stories, and make so many people feel better with those flowers– **somewhere in that hospital he discovered deep within himself that even when he thought he had so little to give – with God leading the way - he discovered that he had much more to give than he ever imagined...**

Because although we 'make a living by what we get – we really make a life by what we give'... and when we strive to live in spirit – our hearts grow increasingly generous...

Friends, you may have been lead to believe (that you're too small to make a difference in the world), that your efforts will never amount to much, but leave here this morning knowing that in God's eyes - there is nothing further from the truth...

You already have more than you know – but the question you must ask yourself is – are you willing to share it?... are you willing to share yourself?...

May you be blessed with a generous heart, the desire to go deeper with God, and may the love of the Lord be your inspiration – now and forever...

In Jesus' name we pray...

Amen!...