

“What Are We Going To Do About It?”

John 6:1-14

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The site where our text occurred is one of the first I visited on my recent trip to Israel. This is because our group stayed at the Pilgerhaus, a retreat center operated by the German Association of Israel, which is around the corner from the Church of the Loaves and Fishes. Each morning while in Galilee, I watched the sun come up over the horizon and then took a walk by this church.

The church is built over the rock that many feel Jesus used as a table to receive and bless this little boy's lunch. In that culture, people prepared food on a rock when they were traveling. Rocks were considered to be clean, at least cleaner than the ground, because people avoided walking on them. The rain also washed them periodically.

Preparing and serving food to a large crowd was the last thing that Jesus and his disciples thought they would be doing that day, however. They came to this secluded place on the shore of the sea to get away from the people. The disciples returned from their first mission trip exhausted and hungry. Jesus sensed their need for rest and led them to this place.

The crowd came looking for them and walked along the shore until they found them. They picked up others as they walked and their numbers swelled to over five thousand. Jesus could not turn them away because he sensed their spiritual hunger. As a result, he taught them late into the afternoon.

As the day drew to a close, Jesus knew the people were hungry. He surprised Philip by asking him where food could be found to feed the masses. It is obvious from Philip's response that he was shocked and confused. “Eight months' wages would not buy enough bread for each of them to get a little” John 6:6. I get the impression Philip didn't think Jesus asked the right question.

You know what happened next. Andrew brought a little boy to Jesus that had five barley loaves and two fish and was willing to give them to him. Little did Andrew or anyone realize that this act of generosity would make it possible for everyone to eat before making their journey home.

There are two questions in this story that I want us to consider this morning. Quite frankly, I cannot think of two more appropriate questions to ask in these uncertain economic times.

The first is the one that Jesus posed to Philip, **“Where are we to buy bread for these people to eat?”** The second was asked of Jesus by Andrew after offering him the boy's meager lunch of fish and loaves, **“But what are they among so many people?”**

The first is the question of a prophet, and to their credit, the people recognized this. You see, a prophet announces the world's greatest needs and asks his audience what they are going to do about it. This is what Isaiah, Jeremiah, Amos, Ezekiel, Micah and others did and Jesus followed their lead. The people were hungry. Jesus was not content, as his disciples appeared to be to send them home with empty stomachs. Something had to be done and he believed they needed to do it.

This question has haunted me on many occasions and this is certainly true this fall because of the downturn in our economy. I wonder how many in our church and community will struggle to put food on their tables. I already know some that are and suspect this is the tip of the iceberg.

In recent weeks, I've pondered the role of the church during these tough times. **What is our mission?** Is it to solve the economic crisis? No, that is the role of our country's leaders. Is it to cast blame? I believe we do have a responsibility to speak out against unbridled greed and the destruction it causes. Allocating seven figure bonuses to executives as firms were preparing for Chapter Eleven was unconscionable. Without a doubt, our voice needs to be heard as we speak about the need for justice, mercy and humility. Jesus certainly was not timid about confronting those that abused power or speaking out on behalf of the victims.

However, I believe our most pressing duty as the body of Christ in these times is to feed hungry people. It is to identify those that are hurting and help them. It is to give people hope and let them

know they are not alone. Their problem may be bigger than they are, but it is not bigger than we are when we share like this little boy did and those that were inspired by his generosity.

I must tell you that I do not believe our text is merely about how one problem was solved on a distant day and shore. I think it is an example of how all problems are solved, and that is through the miracle of sharing. Old Testament scholar, Walter Brueggemann writes about the “always more of God.” I believe this story reinforces that and talks about the always more of God’s people.

I know there are many ways to re-enact what Jesus did that day along the shore of the Sea of Galilee. The four gospel writers don’t even agree on all the details. Let me share an idea with you for you to consider, though.

Was it possible that Jesus took that little boy’s lunch, held it up and taught them one more lesson that day, a lesson on sharing? Could he have used this little boy’s willingness to share his meager meal to inspire others to share what they had? James Hudnut-Beumier writes, “The way to encourage generosity is to recognize it publicly and to support those who display its virtues.” Was Jesus doing this? A strong case could certainly be made for this interpretation.

Do you think this boy was the only one who packed a lunch that day? No, everyone did because no one left home without food for the day. There were no restaurants like we are accustomed to seeing or resources to buy food in the marketplace for most commoners.

I don’t think, however, that many people thought they would be gone all day. Remember, they followed Jesus around the lake and once finding him listened to him teach until dusk. Few, if any, packed enough food for the entire day.

No doubt some had more food left at the end of the day than others and Jesus knew it. He also knew that if they sat in groups and put everything out they had, everyone would have enough to eat.

I have come to believe this is a story about sharing and in some ways the first church potluck. It was also a way for Jesus to teach a final lesson that day, and what was that? **If we share with our neighbors like we did today, no one will ever go hungry.**

I know this interpretation is not as glamorous as having Jesus mass produce five thousand meals, but for me it is more meaningful and thought-provoking. It certainly helps me to understand how followers of Christ can respond to a national crisis and truly make a difference.

In light of this, I challenge you this week to be sensitive to those around you that are in need. See them as Jesus saw this crowd, with heartfelt compassion. Be prepared to respond spontaneously to someone that needs hope and help. Be a good neighbor.

As a church, I want us to use the resources available to us to help our members that are struggling and to support the Lilburn and Stone Mountain Cooperative Ministries that are struggling to help our entire community. I’ve written about my proposal in our church newsletter and shared it in last Sunday’s business conference. I am asking Tim Adcox and the Missions Committee to take the lead in making it possible for us to help our members. They are working on the details and will keep us informed. I appreciate their willingness to accept this challenge and lead us.

I know responding to this financial crisis in our country will not be easy for any of us because everyone has taken a big hit in recent weeks. We’re experiencing fatigue with the heavy load we are carrying and I am asking us to make even more sacrifices. You must understand, though, that this was precisely the setting for the feeding of the five thousand.

You recall that I said at the beginning of the sermon that the disciples were hungry and tired upon returning from their first mission trip. All they wanted to do was get away from the crowd and spend time alone with Jesus. None of them shared Jesus’ desire to feed the people that evening. They were overwhelmed and wanted to send the people away. Even Andrew revealed his pessimism when he brought the little boy’s lunch to Jesus. “What are these loaves and fish among so many?”

It was enough, wasn’t it? As a matter of fact, it was more than enough. Twelve baskets of food were left over.

I think we have enough to feed the hungry around us, too. Let’s find out in the weeks and months to come as we share our fish and loaves.