

Bellaire Community United Methodist Church

May 29, 2016

## **“Fish and Chips”**

*Let the Children Come, part 4*

John 6:1-15

I am so glad that you are here with us this morning. You had a choice today, and you chose to be in God’s house with God’s people. I want to affirm that decision and remind you, you are not alone. Not ever. Right now you are literally surrounded by people who care about you. But even better, every moment of your life, Jesus Christ is there for you. You might not even know who He is yet, but His care for you is greater than anything you could ever imagine. Trust me, I know. I am not here this morning because I’m perfect. None of us is. But I know the forgiveness and love of Jesus Christ, and you can, too.

Would you take a moment and pray with me? I invite you to place your hands out, palms open, as a sign that you are ready to receive what God has for you today. Let’s pray.

Lord of Creation, we humbly come to your house this morning, asking for your grace to fill our lives once again. We have not earned your love by anything we have done. It is only by the blood of Jesus Christ that we have been redeemed. We ask you to fill us with your Holy Spirit and change us to be more like Christ. Give us the faith of a child, Lord, and we will give you all the praise and honor. In Jesus’ name we pray, Amen.

Have you heard this story before? In the days when an ice cream sundae cost much less, a 10-year-old boy entered a hotel coffee shop and sat at a table. A waitress put a glass of water in front of him. “How much is an ice cream sundae?” he asked. “Fifty cents,” replied the waitress. The little boy pulled his

hand out of his pocket and studied the coins in it. “Well, how much is a plain dish of ice cream?” he inquired. By now more people were waiting for a table and the waitress was growing impatient. “Thirty-five cents,” she brusquely replied. The little boy again counted his coins. “I’ll have the plain ice cream,” he said. The waitress brought the ice cream, put the bill on the table and walked away. The boy finished the ice cream, paid the cashier and left. When the waitress came back, she picked up his empty dish and froze. Lying neatly beside it were two nickels and five pennies. The boy didn’t have the sundae, because he wanted to leave her a tip.

The truth is, generosity surprises us and humbles us. If we are honest with ourselves, there are probably times we have felt more like the waitress and less like the boy. But I believe God desires for us to be generous, because generosity is part of having a childlike faith.

If you’ve been around the last few weeks, you know that we have been focusing in on the words of Jesus in Matthew 18:3. “Unless you change and become like a little child, you cannot enter the kingdom of heaven.” In the past few weeks we’ve learned that childlike faith involves listening to God, having a heart for God, and being brave because we can trust God. I want to wrap up this series on childlike faith by asking what it means to give like a child.

The miracle of the feeding of the five thousand is a popular story. It is found in all four gospels in the Bible. However, only one gospel mentions the source of the original food. John tells us, it was a young boy who shared his lunch.

When you are really hungry, how likely are you to share your lunch? We like to joke around in our house that when Daddy gets hungry, he gets grumpy.

And when he gets grumpy, odds are, he's not going to share his lunch with anyone. The truth is, very, very few people are happy when they are hungry.

I'll bet this young boy was very hungry. He was among the crowd that had been following Jesus, possibly for days. The gospel of Mark tells us that Jesus saw the large crowd and had compassion on them. (Mark 6:34). These people were looking for hope, they were looking for miracles, they were looking for a messiah. They were so desperate for Jesus that they forgot to eat.

Jesus knew their need, so he turned to one of the disciples, Philip, and asked, "Where are we going to buy bread for all of them?" John says this was a test. Jesus already had an answer in mind.

Do you wonder why Jesus asked Philip that odd question? Maybe it was because Philip was the local. You know, the people you ask "Where is a good place to eat? Where are the best fishing spots?" Philip could have been from the local area, so Jesus might have been asking him, "Where is the grocery store?"

But I think it was more than just information that Jesus wanted. He wanted to see how Philip would react to an impossible request. "There are more than five thousand people here, Philip. Where will we find enough for all of them?"

It's odd how Philip answers, because he doesn't answer "Where" he answers "How". He tells Jesus, this is impossible! Even if we had any money (which we don't!), a small fortune would only give them a snack!

I did some rough calculations. The Greek term Philip used is 200 denarii. 200 days' wages. How much could someone earn in 7 months today? Maybe \$20,000? The amount doesn't really matter. The point is, Philip is operating with a mindset of scarcity. Of impossibility.

When Moses was in the desert, trying to get to the Promised Land, the Israelites were asking him the same questions. “Where are we going to get water? Where are we going to get food?” Do you know where they found it? Through God. God provided. They never went without.

My Bible commentary pointed out that a better answer would have been, “Lord, you know. Lord, you can provide it for them.” But somehow, Philip missed it. He gave up before Jesus even got started.

The disciple Andrew had a better response, but he was still skeptical. “Jesus, there’s a young boy here. He brought his lunch. Five rolls. Two fish. But how will they be enough?” Andrew didn’t seem to believe that anything could be done, but he at least told Jesus what they had to work with.

Put yourself in this young boy’s position for a moment, if you can imagine. Your mom packed you a small meal in a basket, told you to be a good boy and come home before dark, and you wandered off with the crowd. You were delighted to see Jesus and listen to him. But you probably kept your food hidden in the big crowd. You crept closer and closer to Jesus, wanting to see him and yet afraid to be noticed. Until, you heard this dialogue. The people needed food. You saw Jesus ask his disciples what they should do. And then you felt this tug in your gut. You could give Jesus your lunch. Your fish and chips. He could do something with them. You weren’t sure exactly what, but you trusted Jesus.

The type of food we are talking about isn’t from the value menu at Long John Silvers. The loaves were small barley loaves, the size of a dinner roll. The fish were probably two small perch, maybe rock bass. This was all that he had, for the whole day. And he gave it up. He gave it to Jesus.

Once Jesus had the food, the miracle could begin. The people sat down. Jesus blessed and broke the bread and the fish, passed it around. The people ate until they were fed up...I mean full. The disciples went around and collected the leftovers – one basket for each of them. These baskets, called kophinos in Greek, were like lunchboxes – they were supposed to hold daily provisions that the Jews could eat to avoid having to eat non-kosher food. There was enough food for the next day.

Every time I read this story, I am drawn toward the boy and his generosity. The scripture doesn't say anything more about him, only that he had given his lunch to the disciples. I don't think he was intimidated or coerced. I think he believed in Jesus, and he knew that his meager offering, in the Lord's hands, would be enough. He didn't hold anything back. He gave all that he had.

If Jesus had asked you, "Where will we find enough bread for these people to eat?" what would you have said? Would you have said, "Lord, it's impossible!" Or would you have had the faith of a child to say, "It's not much, but this is what I have. Here. Have it."

The generosity of children can be stunning. I've been reading the Diary of Anne Frank lately, a 14-year-old Jewish girl who spent two years hiding from the Germans in Holland. She and her family were sequestered in a small building they called the "Secret Annex", and they were totally dependent on their Dutch protectors to bring them food and keep them safe. Because of the war, and the black market where they got their food, they had very little to live on. Despite this, on Christmas 1943, Anne wrote "For at least two months I saved the sugar from my porridge...and I'll have it made into [cake frosting] as a Christmas present for the others.

Two months of saving a few teaspoons of daily sugar, when there was a war going on around them and they had next to nothing. That is extreme generosity. That's the heart of a child.

Have you ever asked yourself, "Why do I give?" Do you cultivate a heart of generosity in yourself? Do you practice self-denial so that you can help others?

We all have a choice to operate like the disciples, in a mindset of scarcity. We can say, "There's not enough to go around. I should just hold on to what I have." Or, we can choose to have the faith of a child that says, "Everything I have is yours, Jesus."

I know there are people that feel what they have to give is barely enough. The truth is, we set a goal of \$3000 a week for our church's budget. \$156,000 a year to do ministry in this church and pay our bills. That averages out to about \$20 a person each Sunday. Yet, there is probably someone sitting out there in the pews thinking, "How can my \$20 make a difference?"

Put your resources in God's hands and watch what he does. Watch the miracles that happen. The people who find Jesus and are saved. The missions and ministry that change lives.

The thing is, you can't expect God to use your gift until you trust him with it. The boy trusted his meal in the hand of Jesus. He saw the need, and he responded with all he had. What would you do?

Sometimes we try to justify our lack of generosity. We think, "because I don't have as much as the family down the street, I might as well not give anything." We operate in the mentality that "there is not enough, so hold tightly to what you've got."

That's not a kingdom mindset. That's not childlike, trusting faith. That's not what God expects of us. The Apostle Paul tells us in 2<sup>nd</sup> Corinthians 9:6-7 what God expects.

“Whoever sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and whoever sows bountifully will also reap bountifully. Each one must give as he has decided in his heart, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver.” 2<sup>nd</sup> Corinthians 9:6-7

What if we saw what we have to offer – I'm not just talking money, but also time, talent, energy, service, compassion, a listening ear, friendship...What if we saw all of this as an offering that God can multiply? What would look different in our church, our community, and our world?

I know some people get this. They see what God can do when they willingly offer all that they have. They give their money, not to pay the bills, but to support the ministry of this church. They give their time because they know the relationships they build here will multiply the number of disciples in the kingdom of heaven. They give because they want to give it away.

How will you respond to what Jesus is asking you to do? Jesus had compassion on the crowd. The young boy had compassion and gave what he had. The truth is, God wants us to meet our budget, but that's not all. God wants us to pray. Lead bible studies. Serve in the food pantry. Counsel at summer camp. Serve as mentors to our youth. Visit the sick and the home-bound. Whatever your metaphorical “fish and chips” is, God wants you to give it to him.

We all need to say, “God, I don't have much, but what I do have, I place in your hands, trusting you to multiply it.” That's childlike faith. I pray that we would all learn to give cheerfully and without hesitation.

Memory verse

John 6:35 - Then Jesus declared, "I am the bread of life. Whoever comes to me will never go hungry, and whoever believes in me will never be thirsty."

Reflection questions

1. Recall a time when someone asked you to do something impossible.
2. Under what circumstances do you share your food? Does it depend on how hungry you are, or if you know the person you share it with?
3. Why do you think the boy in John 6 shared his lunch with Jesus?
4. Do you think you have a childlike faith? Do you trust Jesus with your resources? Do you expect the Lord to multiply what you give?
5. Is there something you need to change about how you use your time and resources to be more faithful to Jesus?