

**Date: July 29, 2018**

**Scripture: John 6:1-15**

**Title: WHAT CAN YOU OFFER JESUS?**

Father Jerry Fuller once told a story about a young couple in North Carolina who were set to open their own restaurant. All that was needed was the final health inspection and the issuing of their business permit. They were scheduled to receive the permit the next day. This occurred in September, 1989. The couple named their little restaurant “Our Place” and they were excited, that they were finally ready to open.

But that morning the winds and rains of Hurricane Hugo hit the Atlantic coast. Unexpectedly, this ferocious storm made its way 200 miles inland to their small town. Trees were uprooted, power lines were down, homes and stores were destroyed. The young couple hurried to their restaurant to see if it had been affected. Fortunately, everything was intact.

A deputy sheriff pulled up to the couple’s restaurant and told them that their restaurant, the fire station next door and a service station down the road were the only ones that had electricity. The young couple called the health inspector and begged him to come immediately so they could open, but because of the power outage, the inspector couldn’t get into his office to issue the permit. No permit, no business opening. With a refrigerator stocked with 300 pounds of bacon and beef and bushels of tomatoes, lettuce and bread, there was only one thing to do. They decided to give the food away.

They told the deputy, “Tell your coworkers and other emergency people you see that we’ll have free BLT’s and coffee for anybody who wants to drop by.”

“Soon firemen, policemen, linemen and other workers were filing into Our Place. When the couple heard that another restaurant was scalping people by charging ten dollars for two eggs, toast and bacon, they placed a sign in their window: FREE BLT’S, FREE COFFEE. Families, travelers and street people were welcomed.”

Then something quite amazing began to happen. People who happened by started cleaning counters and sweeping floors. Volunteers took over the dish washing. People from a neighboring town that had not been hit too badly by the storm heard what was happening and they brought food from their freezers. Nearby merchants also heard and they responded with foodstuffs of all kinds.

And somehow as the day went on, those first cups of coffee and BLT’s stretched to 16,000 meals. The restaurant’s small stock of supplies actually increased by 500 loaves of bread, 350 pots of coffee and bushels of produce. A miracle had occurred in that small North Carolina town, a miracle of love.

It all sounds kind of familiar! A little bit of food stretches into a great deal of food.

Today’s lesson takes place near the Sea of Galilee. As seas go, the Sea of Galilee is quite small, only 13 miles long and, at its widest, 8 miles across. To have some quiet time for himself and his disciples, Jesus had crossed over to the other side of that body of water. But, as we noted last week, the people followed Jesus in great crowds. They wouldn’t leave him alone.

In those days, people didn't work on the clock. They didn't work 9 to 5. Most of them worked for themselves, maybe farming a small piece of land, or owning a fishing boat, or sharing a small business with their friends and relations. There was no reason why they couldn't just drop their work and follow after Jesus. So they did follow him. Some sailed across the sea in small boats; others walked round the northern end of the sea. By the thousands, they came searching for him and finally they found him.

Jesus had gone up on a mountainside where he was sitting down to talk with his disciples. When he saw the great crowd gathering around him, he said to Philip, "Where shall we buy bread for these people to eat?"

Good question. How were they to be fed? There was no McDonald's nearby, no Wendy's or Burger King. Jesus turned to one of his disciples and asked his advice on the matter. Philip answered, "It would take more than half a year's wages to buy enough bread for each one to have a bite!"

From Philip's answer, it's clear, that even if there had been a carry-out nearby, there wasn't enough money in the treasury to feed that large a gathering.

Then the disciple Andrew spoke up. He's the one who brought his brother Simon Peter to Jesus. Andrew was certainly not the leader that Peter was, but I wonder if he wasn't something else. I wonder if Andrew wasn't genuinely, a people person. Andrew speaks up and says, "Here is a boy with five small barley loaves and two small fish, but how far will they go among so many?"

Maybe no one else among the disciples would even have noticed this young boy among the vast throng. Children didn't count when they reported the attendance at their meetings, and neither did women. Jesus changed all that. But Andrew had noticed this young fellow. "Here's a boy with five small barley loaves and two small fish . . ."

**I would like to think there's some young boy or girl here this morning who, like this lad with the five small barley loaves and two small fish, has something to offer Jesus.** We need to take our ministry to children seriously. It's said that the eighteenth century discovered the man, the nineteenth century discovered the woman, and the twentieth century discovered the child. Well, we're in the twenty-first century now, but for many of us, children are still at the heart of the church's life. I want boys and girls to know that they can and will be an important part of our church. They're worth whatever effort we put into supplying them with a first-rate Christian education. Like what was given this past week at vacation bible school.

Samuel Wesley was a devoted priest in the Church of England. In Wesley's heart, there burned a desire to see the church renewed and revived. One day he was studying and praying while his two small children, John and Charles, were playing on the stairway. They were quite noisy, as young boys tend to be. Finally, Samuel Wesley became so distracted by the noise that he rushed out of his study and shouted at them: "Go play elsewhere. I am trying to pray for a great revival to come upon the church, and your noise is disturbing me."

Little did Samuel Wesley know that the great awakening for which he was praying was running up and down those stairs, in the persons of his own small boys, John and Charles Wesley, who would one day become key figures in that awakening.

E. T. Sullivan has written, “When God wants a great work done in the world or a great wrong righted, he goes about it in a very unusual way. God doesn’t stir up his earthquakes or send for his thunderbolts. Instead, God has a helpless baby born, perhaps in a simple home and of obscure parents. And then God puts the idea into a mother or father’s heart, and they put it into the baby’s mind. And then God waits. The greatest forces in the world are not the earthquakes and the thunderbolts. The greatest forces in the world are young children.”

Boys and girls matter in our lives. Boys and girls matter to the church. We need to do everything we can getting them to church and helping them grow in the knowledge and love of Jesus Christ. Paul writes in I Timothy 4:12, “Don’t let people look down on you because you are young . . .” (Phillips Translation)

We’re thankful for our children and our youth, but our potential for service to Jesus doesn’t decrease with age. We’re also thankful for adults. We dare not let our cultural obsession with youth, blind us to the fact that many persons have their most productive years, late in life.

**Everyone in this room, of every age, has something to offer to God.** Someone wise once said, “Our life is God’s gift to us. What we make of life is our gift to God.” Every one of us has something to offer God.

Jesus took the young boy’s five barley loaves and two small fish and blessed them and had his disciples distribute them to the multitudes, and thousands of people were fed and when they gathered up the leftovers, they filled twelve baskets. The effect of this miracle was electric on the crowd. They said, “A prophet has come into the world,” and they wanted to come and take Jesus by force and make him king.

But, Jesus didn’t want to be a mere earthly king. He wanted to be king of their hearts. He wanted to find other young men and young women and aging men and aging women with 5 barley loaves and 2 small fish to offer, and then help them see miracles in their lives as well. That was Jesus’ plan then. That’s his plan now.

**Jesus is looking for persons whose influence he can magnify and multiply.** That’s how he has always worked. That’s Jesus’ plan for the redemption of this world. Each one of us, young and old, offering ourselves to Christ, finding that one gift we have to offer Christ, and seeing it through, until the day comes, when we see his victory and we give thanks for having played a small part in that victory.

As someone has noted, “The story of the feeding of the 5000 appears in all four gospels, but only John’s gospel says the loaves and the fishes came from a boy. Like the New Testament widow who put her last two coins in the treasury, like the Old Testament widow who used the last of her meal and oil to make bread for Elijah, this young boy gives all he had. These three people are nameless, yet their acts of faith, trust and generosity are still remembered.”

There's a phrase that you hear nowadays, particularly in business circles. The phrase is, "What's in your wheelhouse?" An online dictionary defines the term like this: "In baseball this is the part of an individual's swinging range, in which as a hitter they can make the best contact with the ball. If a pitch is right in your wheelhouse, it's right where you want it, in the spot where you have the best chance of hitting it well." They add, "The term is also often used to explain something that falls into a person's area of expertise."

I want to ask you this morning, "What's in your wheelhouse, that you can offer Jesus?" Giving to his kingdom isn't just about giving material gifts. Giving to his kingdom is about giving yourself. Have you a specific skill that Christ can use for the betterment of the world? What's in your wheelhouse that you can offer Jesus?

A young lad had five barley loaves and two small fish that he offered Jesus, and look what happened. Can you imagine how that young man felt when he got home? Can you imagine his excitement as he tried to tell others? You and I can know that kind of excitement. All we have to do, is to give Jesus, what's in our wheelhouse. Working from our wheelhouse, let us Trust, Believe, and have an Active Faith in God making disciples of Jesus Christ in the transformation of the world. Amen.