

## Sermon Series, part 1: Generous Living

Pastor Hubert Den Draak, July 13, 2014. Scripture reading: Mark 6:30-44

### Week 1: "Life-in-your-face"

Let's face it: Jesus can be unreasonable. I don't mean that as blasphemy but as an honest assessment of this passage that tells us about a big crowd that want to be near Jesus, but then they need to be fed - but there's no food around.

It's sort of like this scenario: imagine there's this popular new restaurant in town, and the owner creates this new dish on the menu. He advertises it with billboards, ads in the papers and flyers in everyone's mailbox. So the next day, people are lining up around the block to get into the restaurant. Everyone wants to try this special dish. Like, right now.



There is just one little problem: the chef and his staff simply don't have all the food to satisfy this sudden demand. So, with the people demanding their food louder and louder, the desperate staff turn to the owner for a solution. But all he says is, "You handle it".

That is pretty much the situation in this morning's Bible story. No wonder the disciples protest. As we read in Mark: "*They asked, 'Do you want us to go and spend two hundred silver coins (a small fortune) on bread in order to feed them?'*" Basically what they're saying is, "Are you kidding?!"

We can identify with the disciples. If we were in their shoes we would protest too. This isn't fair. They just experienced what I call "life in your face."

So how did this happen? Jesus and his disciples have only just begun God's ministry, when they hear the shattering news of the cruel death of John the Baptist by king Herod. So Jesus gathers his disciples and they go into what we'd now call a retreat. As Mark puts it, "*So they went away in a boat by themselves to a lonely place.*" They want to be alone and deal with their grief. They also need to refocus on their mission and regroup for the tough task that's ahead of them.

But then Mark continues, "*Many people, however, saw them leave and they recognized them; so they went from all the towns and ran ahead by land and arrived at the place ahead of Jesus and his disciples.*"

Sometimes "life-in-your-face" is like that. It throws you a monkey wrench and you need to stop and catch your breath and recover; but people still come to you with their issues, their needs and their problems, "Listen to me! Deal with me - now! I don't care how exhausted you are or how you feel!"

When we lived in Toronto we knew this couple from church who became friends of ours. He was a stay-at-home dad, and she had a high-pressure job at an advertising agency. And I remember them telling us about raising their children. She said that she'd get home, exhausted from work, and her partner would meet her at the door with a baby in his arms saying, "Here, you take him. I really need some time for myself now!" She would mumble something like, "At least let me take off my coat", but he would already be out of earshot. That's "life in your face". We all know that feeling, don't we? And that's where this lesson from the gospel intersects with our lives.

This is one of the very few stories of Jesus' ministry that is reported by all four Gospels. It means that something important is transmitted in this teaching of Jesus. With "life in our face", we tend to rush ahead and fixate on the special effects of the multiplication. We ooh and ah over the wonder of how God provides. However, in our hurry to get to the quick fix, I believe we miss a profound truth that Jesus wants us to know. In fact, without it, the 5000 would never have been fed...



There's this story about a mighty warrior who had this magnificent, powerful horse on which he rode down the road. Of course everyone made sure to get out of his way. Everyone - except this one little sparrow. It was directly in his path, in the very middle of the road, and it just wouldn't budge. And when the warrior looked more closely, he noticed that the bird was lying on its back with its feet in the air.

Well, that's unusual, the horseman thinks; and he draws the reins and dismounts. He goes over to the sparrow and asks, "Are you dead...? And if not, what are you doing in the middle of the road with your feet in the air?"

"No," says the bird, still with its feet up, "I'm not dead, but I heard the sky might fall down, and I'm helping to hold it up."

Well, when he hears that, the warrior shakes with laughter. He rolls on the ground slapping his thighs, and every time he wants to say something, he starts laughing again. At last, he wipes the tears from his eyes and says, "You silly bird! Even if the sky *did* fall down, what difference could *you* possibly make with those puny little legs?"

"Well," explains the sparrow earnestly, "you do what you can do."

Generous living begins here. We do the little that we can do, to the best of our abilities. The gospel story from Mark tells us the disciples took stock of how much food there was. Just like the sparrow, it wasn't much. Jesus took the little that they brought him, blessed it, broke it, and gave it back to them. And under Jesus' direction they passed the bread out to the hungry crowd... and it turned out to be enough. More than enough.



*That* is discipleship. Discipleship is living generously in the trust that even the little bit we can offer will turn out to be enough, if done in Christ's name. Volunteering for Shelterhouse, visiting the sick and housebound, a caring phone call just at the right moment, offering a ride to someone who has no car, a conversation with a street person and so on. All those things are discipleship. All those little things we do out of faith, and to the very best of our abilities, just like that sparrow.

It's not going to happen if we lean back and expect God to do it for us. That's not faith. Faith is that we have the courage to step up to the plate first, trusting that God will provide. And the little we do then, becomes enough, if we do it in Jesus' name. Because that's what discipleship is. It's not just *believing* in Christ, that's easy. It's *following* Christ, living a Christ-like life in all we do. It's creating opportunities for Christ's presence and blessing to do their work in the world. And that is a lot more challenging.



Christ invites us to work in partnership with him, because he believes in us. *That's* what our scripture story this morning shows us. Christ tells his disciples (and us), "This is life-in-your-face. *You* deal with it!" Not because he doesn't want to be bothered, and not because he wants us to do the dirty work for him. No, he tells us to deal with it because he knows we can - if we have faith in him. Together with Christ we can start building God's Kingdom of abundance for everyone, one small act of generosity at a time.

That is what discipleship is. That is what being church means. It's a big honour, and I don't know about you, but I find that pretty exciting. It's also a pretty big challenge and a pretty big responsibility.

So thank God it's not just up to us.

Amen.