

Wesley United Methodist Church

August 26, 2018

“We Can’t Afford it! Oh, Really?”

John 6:1-15

One Saturday Ken Erickson’s wife was cleaning out leftovers from the refrigerator. She gave the remaining portion of tortellini to their 6-year-old son, Jeremy. Their 8-year-old son Matthew, also wanted some, so, of course, there was some bickering. After several unsuccessful attempts to mediate the dispute, Ken decided to use a theological approach. Hoping to convince Jeremy to share his portion with Matthew, he said, “Jeremy, what would Jesus do in this situation?” Jeremy immediately answered, “Oh, Dad, He would just make more!”

Yes, that’s exactly what Jesus would do. Jesus would make more!

Would you agree with me that the biggest problem facing the church today is lack of faith? It’s not lack of resources. We think it is, but it’s not. The first question someone will ask when a necessary expense is brought up here at church, “Where’s the money coming from?” But that’s the wrong question. The only question we should ask is: Is this God’s will for our church? We may not realize it, but we are rich in terms of both financial strength and talent. We only scratch the surface of our giving of either. What we lack is faith.

We could feed the world’s hungry. Not by ourselves, of course, but with the help of other caring people. Remember, there are two billion Christians on this earth. We could give comfort to the lonely, freedom to the captives, hope to the desperate. We have the resources. All we lack is faith.

What is it that Christ said? “...if you have faith as small as a mustard seed, you can say to this mountain, “Move from here to there’ and it will move. Nothing will be impossible for you.” (Matth. 17:20-21) The problem, friends, is not our lack of resources, but our lack of faith.

In today’s scripture from the gospel, Jesus is on a mountainside with his disciples. He looks up and sees a great crowd coming up the mountain. A small army, really. Five thousand men and an untold number of women and children. That’s kind of scary. Suppose we were having a church supper and a thousand people would show up? We would be scurrying around, probably in a panic. Jesus didn’t panic. He turns to his disciple Philip and asks, “Where shall we buy bread for these people to eat?” The writer of John says that he asked only to test Philip, for he already had in mind what he was going to do.

Philip said, “Eight months’ wages would not buy enough bread for each one to have a bite!” Another of his disciples, Andrew, Simon Peter’s brother, spoke up, “Here’s a boy with five small barley loaves and two fish, but how far will they go among so many?” As far as the disciples were concerned, the problem was resources. They didn’t have enough. Jesus knew better. What they had was not a resource problem, but a faith problem.

Jesus said, “Have the people sit down.” There was plenty of grass in that place, and so they sat down. Jesus then took the loaves, gave thanks, and distributed to those who were seated as much as they wanted. He did the same with the fish. When they all had enough to eat, Jesus said to his disciples, “Gather the pieces that are left over. Let nothing be wasted.” So they gathered them and filled twelve baskets with the pieces of the loaves and the fish.

So, was there enough? Sure. There wasn’t a resource problem. There was a faith problem. Get Jesus involved and resources will be found. That’s true in the church. We don’t have a resource problem. We have a faith problem. It’s amazing what people can do when they are full of faith.

A church that has inspired many people through the years is The Church of the Savior in Washington, D.C. under the leadership of Gordon Cosby. This is a group of people who know about acting on faith. For example, many years ago, when they were first getting started, this church made what many would regard an “irrational decision”...to buy a piece of property now known as Dayspring Farm. From a rational standpoint they couldn’t have done a sillier thing. They just bought their church building on Massachusetts Avenue. At the time they only had 15 or 20 members. Only half of them were employed in paying jobs. And they owed \$100,000 on their building.

But the Spirit was moving within the members of this congregation, in ways mysterious and unsettling. Individual members began coming forth with checks, small but sacrificial, urging the pastor to begin the search for an out-of-town location for a prayer and retreat ministry. Against his better judgment, Gordon Cosby appointed a committee as they began searching for property.

They found a farm for something like \$37,000 for 180 acres in Montgomery County. (This was many years ago when land in that very expensive county was still cheap!) They prayed and then voted unanimously to do that idiotic, irrational thing. They owed \$100,000. They didn’t have a clue as to how to finance their little church. They were in a brand new building. And they voted to spend \$37,000 on a retreat farm. It was a decision bathed in prayer, beginning with two people who gave checks. Within a year, the Atomic Energy Commission decided to relocate and move to a

site one mile from Dayspring Farm. Before anyone set foot on their property, within a year it was worth \$500,000. Now it's worth much, much more. "Had we waited until it made fiscal sense," asks Gordon Cosby, "would we ever have Dayspring? Of course not."

"Sometimes, if the prayer life is deep enough," Cosby continues, "decisions which seem irrational are bathed with a kind of wonder. This is true for individuals. It is certainly true with churches."

This is what the feeding of the 5000 is about, it is about having faith, not fear. It is about asking, what is the need? Not what are our resources? It is about so bathing ourselves in prayer that we are not afraid of attempting the seemingly impossible for God. Because with God, nothing is impossible.

I'm sure you have noticed the rapid growth of so-called mega churches in our country. Going to church today is somewhat like going to the supermarket. Few people go to the little corner grocery. They prefer driving miles to the mega-mart. It's difficult for the small store or the small church to compete. One key reason these mega-churches have grown as they have is that they are not afraid to step out on faith. Their pastors are no more dedicated, their leadership is no more spiritual, their prayers are no more sincere. What they are willing to do is to put wings to their faith by daring great things for God. And God has rewarded their faith.

We need to be asking what God needs from us. What unique ministry could we have to our community and to our world? What great dream has God planted within our hearts? And then we need to begin gathering our resources to do what God has called us to do in the knowledge that God will provide the means to accomplish what God has called us to do. What could possibly be more tragic than hearing God's call and not responding?

I would hate for us as a church to be the people who did not respond to God's call. What is God calling us to be and to do as God's people in this time and in this place? It's not a question of resources. It's not asking the people of this church who give the most money if God's call for this church is okay with them. It's a question of faith.

Jesus had the people sit down. Then he took the loaves and the fish, gave thanks, and distributed to those who were seated to eat as much as they wanted. When they all had enough to eat, he asked his disciples to gather the leftovers. They gathered them and filled twelve baskets with the pieces of the barley loaves and the fish. That's what happens when Jesus is involved in any project.

Several years ago a retired pastor and his wife moved into the Pueblo area. At one of our clergy gatherings he shared the call he received from God to start a program called 'Feeding the 5000' in the Pueblo area. It was a program that was quite successful in another area where they lived. This mission was introduced to others and the project took off with lots of prayers and hard work. People were fed. The following years, God encouraged more people to work the mission and more people were fed. This year's Feeding of the 5000 is just before us and we know that God has called us to work hard and to follow in the footsteps of Jesus. At the same time people share that Jesus "is the bread that...gives life to the world."(Matth. 6:33-34) "I am the bread of life. Whoever comes to me will never go hungry and whoever believes in me will never be thirsty." (verse 35.) Tony and Beverly Ashworth decided to live by their faith, they knew that the resources were at hand and that it was our mission to help feed the hungry. They shared their desire to improve the well-being of many people in Pueblo and surrounding areas. We thank God for their faith and their great love for Jesus. To hear and to follow God's call boldly is what faith is all about. It's a commitment to be a faithful servant.

St. Paul put it like this in the letter to the Ephesians: "Now to him who is able to do immeasurably more than we ask or imagine, according to his power that is at work within us, to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, for ever and ever!"(3:20-21)