

“AN INSIGNIFICANT GIFT”

JOHN 6:1-15

FEBRUARY 23, 2020

-First Sunday in Lent-Stewardship Sunday

We may look at our bank account and wish we had more money in there, more ability to support this church we love so much. John shows us another way to look at our giving: even the most insignificant gift can feed 5000 when God-Alive gets in the mix. From John 6, verses 1-15, hear what the Spirit may be saying to you today.

After this, Jesus went across the Sea of Galilee (some call it Tiberias). A huge crowd followed him, attracted by the miracles they had seen him do among the sick. When he got to the other side, he climbed a hill and sat down, surrounded by his disciples. It was nearly time for the Feast of Passover, kept annually by the Jews.

When Jesus looked out and saw that a large crowd had arrived, he said to Philip, “Where can we buy bread to feed these people?” He said this to stretch Philip’s faith. He already knew what he was going to do.

Philip answered, “Two hundred silver pieces wouldn’t be enough to buy bread for each person to get a piece.”

One of the disciples—it was Andrew, brother to Simon Peter—said, “There’s a little boy here who has five barley loaves and two fish. But that’s a drop in the bucket for a crowd like this.”

Jesus said, “Make the people sit down.” There was a nice carpet of green grass in this place. They sat down, about five thousand of them. Then Jesus took the bread and, having given thanks, gave it to those who were seated. He did the same with the fish. All ate as much as they wanted.

When the people had eaten their fill, he said to his disciples, “Gather the leftovers so nothing is wasted.” They went to work and filled twelve large baskets with leftovers from the five barley loaves.

The people realized that God was at work among them in what Jesus had just done. They said, “This is the Prophet for sure, God’s Prophet right here in Galilee!” Jesus saw that in their enthusiasm, they were about to grab him and make him king, so he slipped off and went back up the mountain to be by himself.

Here ends the reading. May God bless these words as we seek to apply them to our lives.

I am Johossa, today the hero of the Jews!

Little Johossa, known to no one before today, either by name or by deed—I stand barely as tall as the house gate; unlike by father and grandfather, I have no hair on my face yet; I have no muscles in my arms or legs like my older brothers.

Mostly I get in their way. They brush past me in the mornings, tousling my hair or pinching my back side as they grab a quick breakfast of cakes and head for the fields. I've asked to go help them cut the grain, but my father just says, "No, no, Little Johossa, you are too young; you are too little to go to the fields! I can't spend my time watching after you. The snakes and the scythes, they could cut your life short. The days are short enough without a tragedy; in these months the sun barely rises before it sets. We have no time to waste. Sorry, my little son. You stay here and help your mother and your sisters with their women's chores."

I can't wait to grow big and tall as the trees! I'll tower over everyone in the fields. When I come crashing through the stalks with long strides and suntanned shoulders, the rats and serpents will cower. My strength and my grace will be known far and wide. People will whisper when I bring my grain lorry into the market, so awed will they be of me. They'll say, "There goes Big Johossa. Even the snakes and the scythes bow before him!"

My mother is a religious woman. She begins her day with a prayer that her husband and sons will find tall stalks of grain to harvest, and that her daughters will marry kind and strong persons of faith. She always reserves her last prayer for me. She tells God I am a good son; she asks God to show me a sign that I am the beloved child. I don't know what that means exactly, but it makes me feel all tingly inside when she sings it to the Lord.

Today was a special day. Today I am the hero of the Jews! My sign came from God. Let me tell you what happened: A man came into our neighborhood and announced that a holy teacher, the Messiah, was coming to preach a great sermon. He would be on the hill later that day, and all who want to be saved should come hear him. I was curious about this religious man coming to tell us more about God. I wondered what it meant that we might be "saved," but anyone who is willing to fight the Romans, to save us from their tyranny, is my kind of holy man!

The Romans take all we own, taxing my father for practically all his earnings! We barely are allowed to keep enough to scrape by. Not only are they taxing us, but their soldiers freely help themselves to our grain, feed and animals, cakes and our water. They trample the fields and chase away our dogs, laughing about it while my mother screams at them to go away and my father shelters his children from their stones and arrows. We are powerless against the Romans.

Our own religious leaders tax us even more. They throw the law in our faces, telling us we are not pious enough for God. They criticize us and punish us for not measuring up to their standards. Why do we suffer so? Why do our own priests and rabbis not see the starving children and help us?

I asked my mother if I could go hear the man preach. I expected her to say, "No, Johossa, you're too small, you'll get lost in the crowds." But instead she said, "Yes, my son, yes my beloved one! You may go. God told me this morning in my prayers that you had a special gift to bring the man on the hill. Take these five barley loaves and two fish. When the time is right, he will need them and use them to feed the crowd."

"Well, that's impossible!" I blurted out without even thinking. "This insignificant gift can't possibly feed more than two or three people, and my father and brothers will be angry when they come inside from the fields and find out I gave away their

dinner! I'll be beaten within an inch of my life for my foolish act! These five little loaves of bread and these two scrawny little fish are such small gifts. I'm embarrassed that I can't bring more. If this man is as great as they say, he will expect me to give 100 times what I have in my sack. I am ashamed. I am ashamed of who I am and what I lack."

My mother came near to me with arms outstretched. She took me and hugged me, whispering in my ear, "I have a feeling, Little Johossa, that you will be Big Johossa in God's eyes today."

So off I went in search of the man. My ears and eyes were drawn to the far end of the Sea of Galilee where a great crowd was gathered. There was a lot of commotion, for the man named 'Jesus' was healing people and they were crushing in on him. He escaped a little way up a mount and began teaching us about love and compassion.

I had never heard 'God' and 'love' used in the same teaching. Where was the law? Where was our duty? Where were the Pharisees? Then I saw them, standing apart from him, listening intently. I feared it would not go well for Jesus, for he was questioning the things the Pharisees often said to us. He was telling us we should love ourselves and love others as God loves us. It was a lot to take in; it felt dangerous and exciting all at the same time!

When the sun began to sink in the sky, one of Jesus' disciples said to him that they had better leave, for the crowd was getting hungry and restless and there was no food to feed them. I remembered the lunch sack my mother packed that morning and I walked up to the disciple, who was called 'Andrew.'

"Here, Sir,' I squeaked, "take this food and use it as you will. It is a little insignificant gift, but what I have, I will give to the Lord." The man scoffed but thanked me and gave it to his master. He protested, ""There's a little boy here who

has five barley loaves and two fish. But that's a drop in the bucket for a crowd like this."

I looked up at Jesus and saw kind eyes looking back at me. He smiled slightly and nodded to me. He appreciated my offering, my insignificant gift. "Andrew," he said calmly, "tell the people to come up higher on the hill. This boy's faith will feed five thousand today."

Next the most amazing thing happened. Jesus blessed my gift, giving thanks for it. He broke the bread and did the same with the fish, and then he started giving it to the people. They took food for themselves and passed on the rest of it throughout the crowd. The bread never ran out; there was more than enough fish for everyone. All became still as people ate all they wanted. The disciples filled 12 baskets full of fish and bread from the leftovers. It was a miracle!

Then, Andrew gave me a basket full of food. Jesus patted me on the head and whispered in my ear, "Today, Johossa, you are the hero of the Jews! Your little gift and big faith have fed all the people."

No one believed my story when I arrived home with all the food, but they didn't waste any time digging into it, and I no longer thought of myself as small. I knew my gifts for God were enough after all, significant because they came from my heart and my faith. We should all be so lucky as to give Jesus just what we have and just what he needs to feed his people.

May It Be So.

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