

MISSION AWARENESS SUNDAY

April 29, 2007

SERMON

By Sheena B. Findlay

Enough for All? **You** feed them!

On this Mission Awareness Sunday we in AMS are “thinking along” with PWS&D about how we can become more involved in sharing our resources so that there is “enough for all”, both in our own and other countries. When we consider the magnitude of global problems, which have come out of human disobedience – hunger, lack of access to water, war and violence, domestic abuse, injustice and corruption everywhere, AIDS and other rampant diseases which take the lives of children, families, communities – it is easy to feel that we can do so little to help that we should perhaps simply retreat to looking after our own. It is tempting to ignore the biblical mandate from Genesis onwards which tells us that we are called to be God’s stewards of the earth, and of all the people on it.

The scriptures constantly remind us that **God has a process** for dealing with seemingly enormous problems, a “model for mission” which He is more than willing to teach us if only we are willing to listen. In John 6, we see Jesus patiently teaching – and demonstrating – to His followers, how to “do mission” when the odds appear to be impossible.

First, He challenges them – and us – to a change of heart, a change of perception, concerning people in need. He alerts them – and us – to people’s physical hunger (1-13) and then, to the deeper need (26-58) for “the food that lasts for eternal life”, which Amos 8 calls “a famine of the word of God”. Like the rest of us, the disciples were aware of God’s prescription for caring for the poor. They had heard often enough the kind of commands in Isaiah 58, for instance, in which God had told His people that **they** were to be responsible for each other.

“This is the kind of fasting I want; remove the chains of oppression and the yoke of injustice, and let the oppressed go free. Share your food with the hungry and open your homes to the homeless poor. Give clothes to those who have nothing to wear and do not refuse to help your own relatives”.

But like ourselves also, they could easily forget or ignore! On this occasion they were tired, the numbers were overwhelming, and they had reverted to a self protective spirit of poverty, rather than a spirit of generosity towards others. Philip’s response to the Lord’s startling “**you** feed them” is characteristic of ourselves when we evaluate situations and our own meagre resources without faith. When we are overwhelmed, we go back to self concern, defending what we have as possessions instead of gifts; we doubt our gracious and generous God’s capacity to provide; our giving becomes stingy, our love strained, our compassion emptied.

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All of us in the family of God need to keep “coming in for service”; we need a heart change, not an oil change! We need constant renewal of “hearts that break” for the poor (Ezekiel 36) and this is a painful process which we often prefer to avoid. If we want to reach out to God’s world we must be willing to allow Him to open our eyes to see the wounded, to open our ears to the cries of the poor, and to keep on breaking our hearts into the compassion which Jesus demonstrates here.

Secondly, Jesus calls His followers to new faith sufficient for the task. As well He calls out the gifts which are needed for the particular situation – and often people do not know that they have the potential for either the growth in faith or the necessary gifts, until they begin to listen to the Lord’s directions for their lives and to His concern for Mission.

Andrew was gifted in making connections and introducing people to Jesus, including his own brother Simon Peter. Even though here he was quite diffident in his faith that it would do any good, nevertheless he finds and brings the boy with his food.

The boy himself had an amazing gift of generosity called out by the Lord, and a truly “childlike” faith” that his small resources could help.

The disciples, probably very dubious about the whole exercise, somehow found themselves with the gift of administration to deal with the logistics of food distribution and crowd control.

Even **the crowd** seemed to have caught something of the gift of sharing and what initially looked like very scarce resources became indeed “enough for all” And in abundance!

Jesus demonstrates, by His prayer of blessing and petition, by His use of people’s gifts, by His calling out of greater faith, that God deals with apparently insurmountable obstacles by using whoever and whatever resources are offered to Him, in even “mustard seed faith”. When God breaks our hearts with some measure of understanding of human suffering and then gets through to us that we are to be part of His answer to world situations, we sometimes react by “rushing madly off in all directions”, desperate to **do** something, anything, and what is begun in the Lord, can end up by being our own not very effective efforts. An essential part of God’s process for Mission is that we remember to keep on listening to His plans, keep on rechecking the instructions, and practice constant waiting on the Lord to discern what He wants each of us to do.

We are all called to a change of heart; we are all called to increased faith and prayerfulness; we are all called as the family of God to be partners and servants in the ministry of “Christ for the world, and the world for Christ” (AMS statement of purpose). But as the Lord shows us here in John 6, and reminds us in John 15: 5-8, we are none of us able to do **anything** if we become detached from Him. And as we see in this passage as well as in Romans 12 or 1 Corinthians 12, we are each given **different** spiritual gifts to use for **different** parts of the ministry of the Body of Christ. The challenge for each of us is to discover our own gifts and the precise place where God wants us to employ them ...

and that takes both faith and courage. It takes faith to wait upon the Lord for strength and direction before rushing ahead of Him into action on whatever is the current concern of our church or our society. It takes courage to venture to use whatever gifts He may have given us, with faithfulness, in the place of His choosing.

It seems from this story that mission and miracles both happen when we are willing to do God's work in God's way. Resources, including "people resources" become available to satisfy the deepest hungers, whether spiritual or physical or both. The overwhelming becomes ordered and manageable. We grow in our faith and are stretched to trust the Lord in new ways. He calls us to discover unexpected gifts and to use these in the power and wisdom of the Holy Spirit. However small we feel our faith or gifts to be, we find to our delight that, in the Lord's planning, nothing is ever wasted; and what we offer with prayer and trust turns out to be exactly what is needed. In fact, we realize the trust of Ephesians 3: 20-21, that our generous "God, by means of His power working in us, is able to do so much more than we can ever ask or think; to Him be the glory" **AMEN.**