

PUT ME IN, COACH!
Our Little, God's Much

John 6:1-14

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First Baptist Church, Jefferson City, Missouri

November 1, 2015

Audio: www.buzzsprout.com/admin/episodes/320623-put-me-in-coach-our-little-god-s-much

Since this is the final sermon in this series, and you have slept in between sermons (not during them!), I thought I would take my cue from school teachers and do a review. Here are some things we have learned about spiritual gifts (those talents, abilities God gives us). Here are some common mistakes regarding gifts: 1) We are tempted to separate spiritual gifts from life outside the church walls; 2) We are tempted to separate spiritual gifts from servant love; 3) We are tempted to think that spiritual gifts are only for clergy; 4) We are tempted to think that spiritual gifts are for solo performances, but they are really for symphonies (they thrive in constellations, not in isolation).

This miracle of feeding the thousands is the only miracle of Jesus' which is reported in all four gospels. John's version is the only one which mentions the boy and the only gospel which mentions that the loaves are made of barley. Why is that important? Barley was considered the bread of the poor. So he was "just a boy," and he was a poor one at that. Not much to work with, right? Wrong. Jesus took the little and made much out of it. Did you notice in the text? The disciples focused on what they lacked (vv. 5-9); Jesus focused on what they had, the resources at hand (vv. 11ff). He's always willing to use what is available. I truly believe that every church has what it needs to minister in its setting, if she will be open to the Spirit.

Remember this: God does not call the equipped; God equips the called. In the hands of Jesus, our little becomes much.

It's interesting that three of our four sermon texts during this series mentioned hospitality (Romans 12; 1 Peter 4). And today, we notice Jesus' hospitality, feeding 5,000. And the little boy's hospitality, sharing his meager resources. Looking back on my childhood, I realize my parents had hospitality gifts. They always had the preacher and his wife for lunch (in our country church, the pastor was part time and drove up from Kansas City on weekends). And because of the exercising of their gifts, God awakened a call to ministry in me, as I spent time around pastors in our home. Mom and Dad's little became much.

The year after the KC Royals won the 1985 World Series, manager Dick Howser was diagnosed with a brain tumor. Amidst all the media hype, a pastor friend of mine in the KC area had the courage to call up the Howser family and offer his pastoral care. A friendship blossomed. My pastor friend Jim led Dick Howser to Christ and preached his funeral. A little gesture. Big results. And think how many of our loved ones will be seated at the Messianic Banquet, because people made their little available to God's much. Never underestimate the power of Jesus, especially when we open our hands and hearts and let him use our little.

This beautiful story in John 6 reminds me of another misconception about spiritual gifts--the assumption that God always gifts us around our strengths. Sometimes God gifts us around our weaknesses. I think about how many recovering alcoholics can witness for Christ far better than I can, because of their brokenness. I think about all the doors of witness and ministry that have opened in my own life because I am a prostate cancer survivor. Not my strength, but my weakness. What weakness has God blessed you with? The power of John 6 is not the little boy's native strength; it's his glaring weakness. ***Remember this: God does not call the equipped; God equips the called.***

When Rod and I returned to Sedalia for FBC's celebration of its 150th anniversary, we heard many great testimonies of what God is doing there. One of the most powerful was from a young lady named Kristen. She now has her medical degree from MU. Her undergrad degree is in sociology. For her capstone class, she had to do a community project. She chose to develop a community cafe, feeding hungry and lonely people several days a week. Since 2006, that cafe has fed over 200,000 people. Kristen told the congregation, "All God calls us to do is be ready." I agree with her. Just open our baskets. Open our hearts, our lives. Be ready to use our gifts for Jesus. And watch him take our little and make much.