

## SERVING GENEROUSLY

Matthew 14:13-21

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WATCH/LISTEN: <https://www.fbcjc.org/sermon/serving-generously/>

Our church's mission statement reads: We WELCOME warmly, GROW faithfully and SERVE generously, leading people into LIFE-GIVING relationships with Christ and each other. It's that middle phrase, "serve generously" which we're focusing on this morning. And there's no better story in the gospel about serving generously than our text.

I want us to notice what Jesus did NOT do with the hungry crowd. He didn't judge and shame them for being hungry. He didn't accuse them of being lazy or poor planners or unlucky or sinful. In fact, when the disciples told Jesus to send them away so they could fend for themselves, Jesus replied, "No. You feed them" (v. 16).

But Jesus blessed that small supply and gave the pieces to the disciples to give to the crowd (v. 19). Jesus could have bypassed the disciples and just given it to the hungry people. Jesus basically said, "My relationship with a hungry, hurting world runs through you, my followers."

When we read a great story from the gospels, I always like to play the game: where are we and who are we in this story? Of course. We're the disciples who would like to send hungry people away. We're the ones who are too busy with our own needs; in a bubble wrap of our own grief and pain, too overwhelmed by human suffering, too doubtful that our little could matter in God's hands. But we are the ones, standing in the gap. Jesus hands it to us; we share generously with others. All they had was a few fish and loaves. But that was enough.

In his book, *The Rise of Christianity*, Rodney Stark remarks that the way Christians behaved in the great plagues of the early centuries was a significant factor in contributing to the spread of the faith" [*God and the Pandemic*, by N.T. Wright, p. 61]. Wouldn't it be wonderful if the world could see Christ followers today as the ones making a difference during this pandemic?

Ralph Neighbor, Jr., was a great missiologist of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. He said there are three universal principles for reaching people in a secular culture: serve them, serve them, serve them. You may not feel as if you have much to offer God and others. But God can use what you bring. Our little becomes much in God's hands.

God can multiply it. The Bible says there wasn't just barely enough food that day; there were twelve baskets left over (v. 20)! Over and above...superabundance. Christ can meet the deepest hungers of your life and then there is enough left over to share generously.

So here is a simple summary of where we've been this morning: When Christ is our source and others are our focus, God always provides abundantly. Have you noticed? Sometimes we get the

first phrase right (Christ is our source) but we miss the second (others are our focus) by keeping all the bread for ourselves. Other times, we miss the first phrase and get the second one. We really focus on others' needs but can't sustain and share because our hearts are empty.

Jesus is the Bread of Life. He feeds us. Then we share generously. Amen.