



MINISTRIES

A Ministry of the Athens Universal Life Church
Dr. Rob White – Senior Minister
<https://aulc.us>

TITLE: Giving Jesus a Little Bit

SERMON IN A SENTENCE: Christ blesses our giving, even our small gifts, when given with devotion.

SCRIPTURE: John 6:1-21

Today's scripture lesson comes from the Gospel of John, chapter 6, verses 1 to 21.

Starting at verse 21:

After this, Jesus crossed the Sea of Galilee (or Tiberias).

And a huge crowd was following Him because they saw the signs that He was performing by healing the sick.

So Jesus went up a mountain and sat down there with His disciples.

Now the Passover, a Jewish festival, was near.

Therefore, when Jesus looked up and noticed a huge crowd coming toward Him, He asked Philip, "Where will we buy bread so these people can eat?"

He asked this to test him, for He Himself knew what He was going to do.

Philip answered, "Two hundred denarii worth of bread wouldn't be enough for each of them to have a little."

One of His disciples, Andrew, Simon Peter's brother, said to Him,

“There’s a boy here who has five barley loaves and two fish—but what are they for so many?”

Then Jesus said, “Have the people sit down.”

There was plenty of grass in that place, so they sat down. The men numbered about 5,000.

Then Jesus took the loaves, and after giving thanks He distributed them to those who were seated—so also with the fish, as much as they wanted.

When they were full, He told His disciples, “Collect the leftovers so that nothing is wasted.”

So they collected them and filled 12 baskets with the pieces from the five barley loaves that were left over by those who had eaten.

When the people saw the sign He had done, they said, “This really is the Prophet who was to come into the world!”

Therefore, when Jesus knew that they were about to come and take Him by force to make Him king, He withdrew again to the mountain by Himself.

When evening came, His disciples went down to the sea,

got into a boat, and started across the sea to Capernaum. Darkness had already set in, but Jesus had not yet come to them.

Then a high wind arose, and the sea began to churn.

After they had rowed about three or four miles, they saw Jesus walking on the sea. He was coming near the boat, and they were afraid.

But He said to them, “It is I. Don’t be afraid!”

Then they were willing to take Him on board, and at once the boat was at the shore where they were heading.

-- May the Lord add His Blessing to the reading of His Word!

-- Hello, I am Doctor Rob White with the A U L C Ministries with our message this week.

-- I am happy that you can take a few minutes out of your busy week to be with us today!

A Pastor friend of mine used to serve a small congregation that would have sixty people in church on a good Sunday. They were ordinary people struggling to keep the doors open, but the women's group supported the Heifer Project, an organization that gives livestock to needy people in the Third World. The gift of livestock—even one cow—can transform the lives of people living in poverty.

Those churchwomen understood that, and were happy to help. They didn't have lots of money, but they took an offering at their weekly luncheon and had an occasional fundraiser. They couldn't give much, but they gave enough to help. I admired their vision and their devotion and their enthusiasm. They were doing what they could, and the Lord blessed their work. Not only did they help people who needed help, but the work energized them—helped them to grow spiritually—gave them a reason for being.

That little congregation also supported another group—a local group. Community churches had organized to provide dinner and shelter to homeless men. This little congregation didn't have facilities to house the men overnight, but they took their turn feeding them. Church members purchased and cooked and served food once a month. The church members served dinner and then shared the meal with those whom they had served. The homeless men pitched in after dinner to clean up the kitchen. Everyone had a good time.

The people in that little church could easily have said, "We can't do anything for others. We need help ourselves." Instead, they said, "We have a little bit—and we will use that little bit for others"—and Christ blessed their little bit to make a big difference.

Jeff and Sheri Easter talks about the story behind their song, “Small Town Someone (Lunch)”.

She says, “I was at an awards program a few years ago and my writer friend, Kenna Turner West, won the award in her category. As she accepted the award she graciously and humbly said she was so grateful that God had used her small offerings, her lunch, to feed others. At that moment from the back of the auditorium, I messaged her and told her congratulations and that we have to write that song. A couple years later, we got together and actually had that opportunity. “

Our Gospel lesson tells the story of a situation where a little bit made a big difference. A crowd had followed Jesus to a remote place. Jesus said to Philip, "**Where are we to buy bread, that these may eat?**". The narrator tells us that Jesus "said this to test (Philip), for (Jesus) knew what he was going to do."

Philip answered Jesus, "Two hundred denarii worth of bread is not sufficient for them, that everyone of them may receive a little". Two hundred denarii would be a man's wages for six months.

Philip was right, because there were at least five thousand people to feed. One of the other Gospels says that there were five thousand men plus women and children.

A man's wages for six months would not buy enough bread that everyone may receive a little. Philip was just being realistic. It would take a small fortune to feed such a large crowd. And even if they had money, where could they buy bread? It would take thousands of loaves. They were in the middle of nowhere—there was no Wonder Bread bakery nearby. If you have ever baked bread, imagine how much long it would take to bake a thousand loaves—or two thousand loaves—or three thousand loaves.

Andrew, another of Jesus' disciples, had an idea. He said, "There is a boy here who has five barley loaves and two fish." But then he caught himself. He said, "But what are these among so many?"

When I read what Andrew said, I remembered trying to start a fire not long ago. It wasn't easy. I lit some kindling under the logs and it began to burn. Then the flames died and I had to start again—and again—and again. Each time, the fire started, gave me hope, and then died.

That's what happened with Philip. He had the beginning of a solution—a boy with some bread and fish. He kindled a bit of enthusiasm, and it seemed that he might be onto something. But then he said, "But what are (five loaves and two fish) among so many people?" He caught fire for a moment, but then his flame died.

But Jesus said, "Have the people sit down." That was a bold move. When you ask a crowd to sit, you create expectations. Once they are seated, they want to see what you will do next.

In this case, the people were hungry. They knew it was dinnertime. They knew that Jesus had a reputation for doing spectacular things. When they sat down, you can be sure that they did not expect to go away hungry.

O.K., Jesus! Now what! Philip and Andrew must have been nervous.

But "Jesus took the loaves;
and having given thanks, he distributed to the disciples,
and the disciples to those who were sitting down;
likewise also of the fish AS MUCH AS THEY DESIRED".

"When they were filled, (Jesus) said to his disciples,
'Gather up the broken pieces which are left over, that nothing be lost.'
So they gathered them up,
and filled twelve baskets with broken pieces".

Whenever I read this story, I feel drawn to the boy who had the five loaves and two fish. They were his lunch. I wonder how the disciples went about asking him to sacrifice his lunch. I wonder what he thought. But mostly I wonder what would have happened if the boy had said, "No! You can't have my lunch!"

That was possible, you know. I'm sure that the disciples didn't take the boy's lunch by force. The boy gave the disciples his lunch. What would have happened if he had refused? Perhaps the crowd would have gone hungry. Perhaps Jesus was counting on that boy!

Jesus does that, you know. Jesus counts on us! He wouldn't have to depend on us, but he chooses to depend on us. A great deal depends on our response to his call.

Ray Boltz sings in his song, "What If I Give All", talking about the little boy's lunch:

"What if I give all I have, what would that gift do. My child a gift like that could change the World, it could feed a multitude. He didn't close his eyes or turn away, I can see him standing tall. He saw the need and I can hear him say, What if I give all."

We can see the evidence of that all around us. The world is a mess, but it wouldn't be a mess if people would do what Christ calls them to do. Even those who have only a little bit to offer are important. That little bit, in Christ's hands, becomes a great blessing. Each of us possesses, in some form, five loaves and two fish—a small gift that Christ can use for large purposes:

- Some of us have the gift of MUSIC that can be used for God's glory. That doesn't necessarily mean that we will give a concert at Carnegie Hall or write an Easter cantata. It might mean that we can play the piano for Sunday school kids or sing in the choir. Whatever the gift, in Christ's hands, it takes on power.
- Some of us have the gift of TEACHING. I'm convinced that those who teach Sunday school will be surprised when they get to heaven to learn what great things came from their teaching. They might

find that the unmanageable boy in the third row—the one who always disrupted the class—turned out to be a missionary—or a missionary's father.

- Some of us have the ability to give MONEY, but feel frustrated that our generosity seems not to accomplish as much as we would like. Perhaps all we are doing is keeping the church doors open. But when we get to heaven, Christ will surprise us by revealing what happened inside those open doors.

Or we might feel that the small amount that we are able to give seems completely inadequate. What can Christ do with so little? Christ answered that question when he took the little boy's lunch and fed the multitude.

The women who supported the Heifer Project understood all those things. They knew that they couldn't help everyone, but they acted in faith that, with Christ's blessing, they could help someone.

The church members who served the homeless men might have preferred to rehabilitate them—to get them cleaned up—to get them jobs—to help them get an education—to make a real difference in their lives. What they did instead was to serve them dinner once a month—and to sit at table with them—and to talk with them as friends—and to embody the love of Christ. I don't know how much good they did, but I do know that Christ did not let their faithful service fall to the ground unblessed.

At a pastor's conference, Gerald Sittser mentioned something that happened to him many years earlier. He was a young man—in his early twenties—super-cool—hair down to his shoulders—a cigarette in his hand. He was preparing to serve as a counselor at a church camp, and went through several days of training in counseling techniques. Finally, at the end of that training, a pastor—Tom Stark—stood up to explain the Gospel. I don't know what Stark said, but I do know that it offended Sittser. Sittser told Stark that, if that was the Gospel, he wanted nothing to do with it.

But then a few days later, crushed by the terrible burdens that the kids were carrying and his inability to help them, he remembered what Stark had said about the Gospel. He finally understood that Christ had something that he needed—and that those kids needed—so he gave his life to Christ.

Sittser became a professor of religion at Whitworth College, a Presbyterian school. He has written a number of books that have blessed thousands. The most poignant is entitled "A Grace Disguised: How the Soul Grows Through Loss." That book grew out of Sittser's loss in a tragic accident that took the lives of his mother, his wife, and his daughter. Bill Hybels, pastor of the Willow Creek Community Church, calls that book "the single most reflective and redemptive book on sorrow and loss that I have ever read." I tell you those things about Jerry Sittser so that you will understand that he is doing wonderful things for Christ.

When Sittser told his story about that youth camp, a friend turned to me and said, "Just imagine how differently things would have turned out if Pastor Tom Stark had failed to explain the Gospel to those kids!"

Pastor Stark's words were like that little boy's five loaves and two fish. They seemed inadequate—not much help as measured against the need. They offended Jerry Sittser, who said, "If that's the Gospel, I want nothing to do with it." But Christ blessed that pastor's humble words, and gave them power to change Sittser's life.

Christ has continued the blessing of Pastor Stark's words through the ministry of Sittser to his students—and through the ministry of his students to God-knows-who—and through Sittser's books. I

would not be surprised to learn, when I get to heaven, that Pastor Stark's faithful words about the Gospel those many years ago have helped a million people—or ten million. Christ took that his little bit and turned it into more than enough.

God has given each of us five loaves and two fish—our lunch—enough to feed one person but not enough to do much for anyone else. We wish we could do more. We wish we could give ten million for a new building—or a million for a new organ—or a half-million for some other grand project. But the person who dreams only of the grand gesture often misses the opportunity to use his or her five loaves and two fish—the small resource that he or she can actually give instead of the million that he or she will probably never have.

If it turns out that we are able to give a million someday, we will almost certainly be able to do that only once. But hardly a day will pass—even if we live to be a hundred—that we cannot give Jesus five loaves and two fish—something like our lunch—something large enough that it requires some measure of devotion to give it but something too small for us to imagine that we have done something great. What counts is not the amount that we give but the devotion with which we give it—and what Jesus chooses to do with it. If we give to Jesus with devotion, he will use our gift for grand purposes—world-changing purposes.

Just think for a moment of some of the small gifts that we might give Jesus:

- Our gift might be the twenty-dollar bill—or the hundred-dollar bill—that sits so heavily in our billfold when the offering comes around.
- Our gift might be to give up the grudge that we have against our neighbor—the grudge that we have nursed for a decade and from which we derive so much pernicious pleasure.
- Our gift might be to show an act of kindness to someone at work—a word of praise or a helping hand.
- Our gift might be a donation to one of the agencies that helps the homeless.
- Our gift might be to volunteer one evening a month in a soup kitchen.

The little boy gave up his five loaves and two fish—and Jesus multiplied them—and people around the world are still being blessed today by his story.

Look for a "five loaves and two fish" gift that you can give Jesus. Try to give Jesus a "five loaves and two fish" gift every day. Jesus will bless every gift given in devotion to him—and will make something important of it.

And Jesus will bless us, too, as we give—and make something important of us as well.

-- That's our Lord's message for this Lord's Day and I hope you got a blessing out of it!

-- Go out this week and be a blessing and be blessed! -- For the more you are a blessing, the more you will be blessed!

-- Thank you all for watching and listening and we will see you all next week!

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