

WD March 20, 2023

“Giving”

My boys are very creative. They are in their twenties now and married but when they were little they liked to draw, color, and make things. What I always enjoyed is when they would make their mom or me a picture. As little guys their artwork was very ‘Picasso’ and staying in the lines with coloring books were challenging. They gave all they had, their very best, and poured themselves into their work. They would make pictures and lovingly, proudly bring them to us as a gift. Naturally, their mom and I would do what all parents do with such artwork. We found a space on the frig and put it up with the others.

Today, we have several pieces of artwork that the boys had made which we think is good enough to put on our walls—some really cool pieces actually. Back in the day the early drawings were not exactly priceless pieces of art but that was not the point. The point is that the one who was giving us the art was our sons. That is why we put them on our frig. Those colored pages and pictures that were made for us were made in love for mom and dad and that is all that mattered.

When it comes to giving to the Lord a similar picture is on display with us. What we give to the Lord may not be much. Compared to the things of heaven what we offer is more like a preschool piece of art rather than a ‘Michelangelo work of art.’ That is okay. If the Lord has a frig, He’s going to put our offering up on it just because we are His kids.

Matthew 14:15-21 is the feeding of the 5000. Jesus has had a long day. He has learned that John the Baptist has been killed. The crowds are relentless. A boat ride to the other side of the Galilee cannot shake them. It is getting late in the day and the disciples are ready to send them all away. Jesus sees them and has compassion on them. He heals their sick and talks to the people and just keeps going on and on. The disciples came to Jesus in order to interrupt. They try to sound helpful suggesting that the crowd should be send away so they can get something at McHerod’s in one of the towns. They say, “It is getting late, Jesus. It is probably a good idea to call it a day.” In reality, they wanted Jesus to stop so the disciples could get something to eat. It was the disciples who wanted to leave. The disciples did not have much of a mindset to be all that giving.

Jesus’ answer must have been shocking to them. “You give them something to eat.” Mark 6:37 says that the disciples answered, “That would take more than half a year’s wages! Are we to go and spend that much on bread and give it to them to eat?” “That’s impossible, Lord!” “We don’t have the resources.” Notice the mindset here. The disciples were focused on their limits. They were focused on their needs, hungry and tired. Was it impossible for them or did they just not want to feed the people they wanted to go away. Maybe both.

John 6:9 tells us however that at least Andrew was curious to see what Jesus may do to make this all possible. Instead of looking at what they did not have Andrew took stock of what they did have. A little boy offered up what he had and Jesus made a masterpiece out of it. “Here is a boy with five small barley loaves and two small fish, but how far will they go among so many?” “How far indeed, Andrew!” By the time it was all over Jesus had the disciples pick up the leftovers which amounted to 12 basketfuls, enough for each disciple to gorge themselves for the rest of the night if they wanted to.

This week’s Red-Letter Challenge is giving. Giving more than many other challenge often gets complicated with excuses. “Lord there are too many and we have too little.” “Lord, I am too old and don’t have enough energy or health.” “Lord, I am too busy. My kids are little and super involved in school activities.” “Lord, I don’t know what to say or what to do. I do not feel I have anything to give.” “I have nothing to give. Send them away and I will pray that they find someone who has enough bread and fish to feed them all.”

Yea, but how about a child who has not concept of limits? For the kingdom of God belongs to such as these and for good reason. A child is willing to give what he has. Give what you have to Jesus and that is going to be good.

Or consider the widow Mark 12:41-44. ⁴¹ Jesus sat down opposite the place where the offerings were put and watched the crowd putting their money into the temple treasury. Many rich people threw in large amounts. ⁴² But a poor widow came and put in two very small copper coins, worth only a few cents.

⁴³ Calling his disciples to him, Jesus said, “Truly I tell you, this poor widow has put more into the treasury than all the others. ⁴⁴ They all gave out of their wealth; but she, out of her poverty, put in everything—all she had to live on.”

Those two coins were insignificant by Pharisee standards. By Jesus’ standards it was more than everyone else. The religious guys were putting in a king’s ransom but this widow gave everything she had, perhaps going hungry to do it. She had a perspective like that of a little child—humbling herself like the little one that offered his whole lunch, some bread, and fish—ready to go hungry if someone else could be fed. Both the widow and the little boy were all in. “The Lord will make good use of this. I will love God today more than I love my stomach.” This kind of sacrifice is really hard to wrap our minds around because chances are if you are listening to this you are a person of some means enough to watch this video and I to make it.

Is the Lord asking us to give more than we have? No. And that is the point. Often, we can act more like the disciples than the little boy or widow. We act like there is nothing to offer. This is a perspective that limits what Jesus can do based on the limitations we put on ourselves. Or maybe like the disciples we just don’t want to do it for whatever reason which may be more often the case. Send them away and I will pray for them...But where is the reward in that? Those twelve basketfuls of bread were evidence enough that Jesus will use whatever you offer and make it sufficient for the task, and then some. Being willing to offer is the difference.

However, remember the blessings of a little child giving to his parents. My boys would light up as their grandma or their mom or me put those picture on display for everyone to see. They cannot wait to make more. “Thank you so much! This is beautiful,” we say. Can you imagine how fun it would be for that little boy to see all those people full and to see those disciples carry back 12 basketfuls of leftovers. I will bet that little boy never forgot that day and how much he helped. My guess is that little boy had the best day of his life with Jesus.

I would imagine that this is what it is like when we give what we have to give to the Lord. If it is a tithe, great! If it is a gift to another, great! If it is something no matter how small-- it is at least something that the Lord can use. If it is giving out of love and generosity God will bless it, no matter how small or insignificant it may appear. So, may we meet the challenge to be giving. May we be willing. May we trust the Lord enough to use it. And may those who receive it be blessed by you and me because of Jesus.

Pastor Matt Woods
John 3:30