

JOHNS CREEK UNITED METHODIST CHURCH

Small Steps, Big Impact

Matthew 14:13-21

Sunday, October 16, 2022

Rev. Dr. Charley Reeb, Senior Pastor

I want to talk about how you can make a positive impact on this world. If you are a follower of Jesus Christ, I am willing to bet that you desire to make a difference in this world for Christ. And even if you are not a follower of Christ I am willing to bet that you still want to see positive change happen in a world that is filled with so much pain and sorrow.

As I scroll through the news on my phone each day my heart breaks over and over again – corruption, abuse, terrorism, violence, human and drug trafficking, etc.

It is just as bad right here in Atlanta. I was watching the local news the other night and within a span of about a minute there were these three stories: An infant left in a plastic bag next to a dumpster; an elderly woman shot and killed in her own home by drive by crossfire; a family who was swindled out of their life savings.

I see the pain on the faces of those who walk through our doors needing assistance and someone to just listen to them. My heart breaks.

I know many of you feel the same way I do. You want to see a difference made in this world. You want to see lives changed and people pulled up from the pit of life. And I know many of you have this desire to do something about it. You know that Christ has called us to not only pray for others but to be the answer to prayer for others. You know Christ wants us to let our light shine in a world of darkness.

But maybe you feel stuck because when you think of all the needs around you it is overwhelming and you don't know where to begin. Or maybe you want to do something but you feel you don't have the ability or the knowledge or the experience, so you just take a step back and hope other people will come forward and do something about it. You will pray and cheer them on and you may even give the church some money to support their efforts, but you feel too inadequate to be involved. You didn't go to seminary. You are not an expert in anything. You don't have a lot of time. You have responsibilities at

home or at work. You have kids to feed and bills to pay. Perhaps some of you who are older don't feel relevant or useful to the world anymore and you feel powerless to do anything about all the needs around you.

So perhaps there is this great tension inside of you because you want to make an impact but you feel paralyzed by all the needs and your lack of ability to do anything about them. You keep coming to church and you pray and you hope and you agree with your fellow Christians about what the world needs but you don't feel like you can make any difference.

I want you to know there is a way you can make a difference with the love of God in this world. There is a way you can make an enormous impact in this community for Christ. And it has nothing to do with ability. It has nothing to do with experience or knowledge. It has nothing to do with skill or education. It has everything to do with taking one simple step. It doesn't matter how old you are or how young you are. It doesn't matter what you have done in your past or what mistakes you have made. All you have to do is take one small step and you can make a huge impact for Christ in this world.

Before I tell you what this step is, let me tell you why it is important. If every person who worshipped at Johns Creek UMC took this step, we would have a different community. If everyone took this step, the impact we would make for Christ could make headline news. If everyone took this step, great miracles would happen in the lives of people who are suffering. If everyone in this church took this simple step, the healing we want so desperately for the world would begin in Johns Creek, Georgia.

What is this step? Well, the disciples took this small step one day and the impact it made was enormous. In fact, the impact was so big that the results of it appear in all four gospels – Matthew, Mark, Luke and John. I am talking about the feeding of the five thousand. What an incredible story! Revealed in this story is the small step that can make one enormous impact on the world.

If you are someone who has heard or read this story before there is a good chance that you have missed the world changing step I am talking about. Let's take a closer look.

Matthew 14:13: Now when Jesus heard this, he withdrew from there in a boat to a deserted place by himself. But when the crowds heard it, they followed him on foot from the towns.

By this point in Jesus' ministry he was a superstar. Everywhere he went there were paparazzi. Well, maybe not. But everywhere he went crowds followed him. His sermons were captivating and he healed people and interacted with them unlike any other person. But Jesus was smart enough to know that he needed down time to pray and reflect. The only way he could get away from the crowds was to get in a boat and push off to a quiet place.

Matthew 14:14: When he went ashore, he saw a great crowd; and he had compassion for them and cured their sick.

When Jesus came ashore from his little retreat, he found yet another crowd waiting for him. The text says it was a great crowd. It was great alright. Later in the text it says there were five thousand men, not counting women and children. Counting the women and children it is likely there were over 10,000 people in that crowd! And they were all waiting for Jesus. Can you imagine the demand on Jesus! How did Jesus respond to the crowd? He had compassion on them. He saw their wounds and he spent the whole afternoon healing them.

Verse 15: When it was evening, the disciples came to him and said, "This is a deserted place, and the hour is now late; send the crowds away so that they may go into the villages and buy food for themselves."

Jesus had been healing the crowd all day. They were in the middle of nowhere. The disciples recognized it was getting late. The people had not eaten anything all day. They were hungry, but they didn't want to leave Jesus' presence. So the disciples told Jesus to politely ask the crowd to leave in order to find something to eat.

Verses 16-17: Jesus said to them, "They need not go away; you give them something to eat." They replied, "We have nothing here but five loaves and two fish."

I love Jesus' response. He told the disciples that the

crowd was not going anywhere – they were going to feed them. I can see the disciples laughing. "Jesus, have you lost your mind. There are over ten thousand people here! We can't feed them! John, how much do you have in your lunch bag? Peter? Andrew? Lord, we have five loaves and two fish. That's all we have!"

Does that sound familiar to you? "Lord, I know you have called me to serve you but this is all I have! This is all I have to offer. This is not enough. I can only give this much. I only have this much time. I only have this much experience. I only have...." And that is when the conversation usually stops. We are paralyzed by how big the need is and how small we feel. We think someone more qualified will come along.

But watch what Jesus says next. This is the small step that makes all the difference. Ready? Here it is:

Verse 18: And he said, "Bring them here to me."

Jesus told them to simply bring what they had – the five loaves and the two fish – to him. All Jesus asked of the disciples and all Jesus asks of us is to bring what we have to him. It does not matter how small it is. It does not matter how insignificant we may think it is. The Lord knows how to use it. He knows what to do with it. We just have to trust him. We don't have to figure it out. We don't have to obsess if it is good enough. Jesus says, "Just bring it to me."

This is what so many of us miss! Jesus does not ask us to figure everything out. He does not set a bar as to how gifted or educated we have to be in order to be used by him. So often we think we have to control everything and Jesus replies, "Who put you in charge? You are not in control!" All he asks is that we bring what we have to him. He will know what to do with it! He will know how to use it to make an impact. So what's in your basket? Jesus can do extraordinary things with it. Take a look:

Verse 19: Then he ordered the crowds to sit down on the grass. Taking the five loaves and the two fish, he looked up to heaven, and blessed and broke the loaves, and gave them to the disciples, and the disciples gave them to the crowds.

Jesus asked God to bless what the disciples had. And then he did something interesting. Notice he did not take the food and distribute it himself to those in need. What does the text say? It says he gave the food to the

disciples for them to serve those in need. What does this mean? Jesus always requires our participation when making an impact. Jesus will not serve others without our direct involvement. Jesus wants us to be his hands and feet in this world.

We need to hear this. So often we come to church and we think praying for others is enough or throwing money in the offering plate is enough. We think that attending a worship service is enough or going to a conference is enough. What this text implies is that it is not enough. Through this text Jesus is saying, "If you are my followers, you are my hands and feet. If you are my followers, you will engage those in need and serve them. You will not be on the sideline; you will be in the game. You will see firsthand what I can do through you. I won't do it without you!"

You want to know something that will blow your mind? There is only one incident in the Bible where God meets the needs of others WITHOUT using his people – God providing manna to the Israelites in the desert. Note that the manna stopped once the people reached the Promised Land. Every other time God wanted to help others he did it through his people. We are the hands and feet of Jesus in the world! When God wants something done he counts on us to do it.

What does all this mean? **Jesus is not looking for ability; he is looking for availability.** Jesus is not looking for perfect people; he is looking for those who want to love and serve others. He is not looking for those who have all the answers; he is looking for those who want to be a friend to others. He is not looking for those who are educated; he is looking for those who want to get their hands dirty. He is not looking for those who have figured everything out; he is looking for those who want to see firsthand what God's love is all about.

I believe that one church filled with available people can do more than 100 hundred churches filled with capable people who are sometimes available. I think of the available people in our church. If everyone would be available like them we could change the world. I think of people like Woody Blome and Davida Denton in our church. Talk about people who embody availability for Christ! Just think of all the people in this church they have touched by their ministry and presence.

Some of you may be thinking, "Well, I don't have that much to give. My life is busy and I have meetings to attend and kids to drive around creation." Well, what did we just establish? Jesus just wants what you are available to give. If it is just one hour a week, give that to teach Sunday school. If it is just an extra 30 dollars, give that to the church. If it is just a few minutes to listen to

someone who is hurting, those few minutes can make a whale of a difference! Every little bit the Lord can bless and do miracles with.

This is all Jesus wants. He simply wants us to be available to him. We just have to be willing to step up to the Lord and say, "I give you what I have. I make myself available to you. Bless me and bless what I have. Use me and use what I have. I put what I have in your hands Lord and I trust you to do with it whatever is best for you and your Kingdom." When we make ourselves available to God, miracles happen. Look at what happened in the story.

Verse 20: And all ate and were filled; and they took up what was left over of the broken pieces, twelve baskets full.

Wow! There were 12 baskets full leftover! The disciples provided what they had and God provided the increase! Jesus blessed the bread and fish and fed five thousand families with it. You see, God blessed and multiplied what they had to give away. The disciples had enough faith in Jesus to give him what they had and he multiplied it! That's what God always does – when we give Him what we have He multiplies it so that there is more than we could ever imagine.

When we simply step up and make ourselves available to God he moves like a tidal wave through us to change the world! We don't have to be sophisticated. We don't have to be skilled. We don't have to be well educated. We just have to be available! *Don't look at what you don't have to give. Look at what you do have to give. Then give it to God and watch him multiply it!* Watch him do miracles with it.

Sometimes a miracle happens when someone simply notices another person. According to SunnySkyz.com this thank-you letter was posted anonymously on a forum from a man who was on the verge of suicide. But a random stranger saved him – by simply noticing him.

"To the guy at the train station when I was 18, You saved me.

You don't know it but that day I was going to kill myself. I had just lost what I had thought was my

dream job and my girlfriend dumped me because of it. I got kicked out of my house and I was having the worst week ever. I told my friends the day before that I'd be going on an adventure and didn't know when I'd return. They threw me a going away party with my closest friends. It was nice seeing people that cared and I felt bad knowing that my adventure would never bring me home. I walked to the station and stood a little too close to the yellow line waiting for the inevitable. You must have noticed because you walked over to me and asked me the time. I pulled out my phone and saw the picture of my ex-girlfriend and me which made me even sadder and I'm pretty sure you could tell.

You just started making small talk and asked me what I did for a living. I told you I used to work at a performance shop building race cars but I lost my job. You told me that you were a paramedic and had just gotten off shift. You told me a story from earlier in the day about a little girl who called 911 because her teddy had a bad belly ache. I laughed a little bit and you smiled.

You told me the train wouldn't be there for another 5 minutes and to come sit with you. Initially I resisted but you pushed on. We had what I think was one of the most heartfelt conversations about helping people. You were talking to me like you had known me for years. It made me think about everything and I just started crying. You just put your hand on my shoulder and told me everything was going to be okay. The train came and you had to go but you inspired me. You made me believe that everything was going to be okay.

Last month I graduated from paramedic school. Every night I walk by that same train station and just sit for an hour to make sure no one is going on that same adventure

You saved me and I'm forever in your debt."

One person was simply available to another and it saved a life.

Here is what I want you to do. Please find the place for sermon notes in your bulletin and write how you will make yourself available to God. Write down what you have that you can give to God. We are not asking you to sell all of your possessions and give the money to the church. We are not asking you to shave your head and move to the desert. We are simply asking that you make yourself available to the Lord. Just give what you have to God and his church and watch how God uses it and multiplies it!



11180 Medlock Bridge Road Johns Creek, GA 30097
770-497-8215 www.johnscreekumc.org