

The First Presbyterian Church of Birmingham  
“Children of God: Making the Impossible, Possible”

Rev. Dr. John Judson

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Deuteronomy 14:22-29

Matthew 14:13-21

Your boss has wowed the crowd. She has been presenting down at COBO hall to a packed crowd of about twenty-thousand people. They have given her standing ovation after standing ovation. Nonetheless you look at your watch and it is getting late. Your boss had gone well beyond her allotted time and it is Sunday night, and all of the restaurants are closed so there is no place for these people to go and eat...and since they are from out of town without hotel reservations they will have a long drive home. You and your cohorts pull your boss aside and whisper in her ear that you are concerned for the attendees that they are hungry and have a long way to go before reaching home. Perhaps she should just wrap it up and send the people on their way. Without giving it a thought she turns to you and says, “Why don’t you feed them?” Thinking that it is a great joke you and your friends offer a smile and a laugh. “No,” she responds, “I mean it. You give them something to eat.” Stammering you reply that all that is left from the luncheon are two Jimmy John’s freaky fast sandwiches and a bag of chips. “No problem,” she says, “Bring them to me.” She says a prayer, breaks the sandwiches and says, “You can do it. Go feed them” She has just asked you to do the impossible.

If you can put yourself in that position, then you have an idea of what the disciples were thinking when Jesus told them to go feed the more than 20,000 people who were spread out across the mountain side. Jesus was asking them to do the impossible. Now, you may be thinking to yourselves, well of course they can do it. They are with Jesus. Jesus can do anything. And in some ways that is correct, yet they do not have the advantage of our two-thousand years of hindsight. Sure, Jesus had cured some people who were ill, driven out some demons and stilled a storm. But feeding twenty thousand people...that was probably even above Jesus’ pay grade. After all, Moses, the greatest prophet there ever was didn’t feed the people...that was a God thing. Moses prayed and God caused the food to appear. Moses didn’t take a little bit of manna, give it to his friends and say, “You feed them.” Since the disciples were neither Jesus nor Moses, they knew that this was not going to turn out well. Jesus had just asked them to do the impossible. Even so, the disciples were about to learn a lesson about what happens when the people of God bring their best to God; that sometimes the impossible can become possible.

This lesson is at the heart of both of our morning’s stories. Our Old Testament tale is actually two commands from the Torah, or the Law of God. The first commands that people are to take a tithe of what they produced and bring it to the place where God is worshipped. And if they live too far away to bring animals or produce they are to bring the monetary equivalent. There they are to eat it. On the surface this may sound like the first church picnic on the grounds, but it is more than that. It is in fact a moment when the impossible becomes possible. What I mean by that is that when the Torah says, “they are to eat it” the “they” means the entire community. In other words, everyone share their tithe with everyone else so that everyone has enough. This insures the impossible that all people have enough to eat, regardless of what they were able to produce. The second story expands this sharing to include widows, orphans and others who lived on the margins of society, often unable to provide for themselves. This is again making the

impossible possible, because everyone in society gets enough. This is a lesson God had tried to teach God's people and a lesson that Jesus was trying to teach the disciples.

What we find in this story is a teachable moment; a moment in which Jesus saw an opportunity to continue his training of the disciples. One of the things that we need to remember about Jesus was that he was continually training his followers to take over when he was gone. All of the healings and teachings that Jesus did were not only signs of the in-breaking Kingdom of God, but they were on-the-job training for his disciples. In a sense it was similar to the training that physicians go through. This past week when I was in the hospital, I was asked to be the object of a grand rounds discussion. The head of the Internal Medicine Department arrived with a medical student and three residents. He had them repeat the history they had taken of me then showed them various techniques they should use when doing a complete work-up of a patient. He did so in order that those physicians and future physicians could then do the same thing once they were on their own. This is, I believe, what Jesus was doing with the disciples; he had taught and was now sending them out to try their hand at serving God's people. So, Jesus asked the disciples to bring all they had to him so that he could bless it, then he expected them to trust enough to make the impossible possible, to feed the people. Even though we often see this feeding as one more of Jesus' miracles, I would ask you to see it as the first of the disciples' miracles because they were the ones who time after time, dipped into the little bread and fish and courageously pulled out piece after piece. They were learning that when God's people brought their best to God, impossible things become possible.

What you may ask, does this have to do with us? The answer is that we too are to learn the lesson that when God's people bring their best, their tithe to God, the impossible becomes possible. And what is the impossible we are supposed to be doing? It is in fact what we are already doing. We are making First Presbyterian Church of Birmingham into a mainline church that is not declining, not simply surviving, but is thriving in such a way as to be God's agent of making lives better not only within this church, but in this area and around the world. We are learning that by our bringing your gifts to this community we are insuring that all persons regardless of race, status, sexual orientation or abilities have a place in which they can worship, grow and learn about the love God has for them. We do this through providing for and assisting with worship, Sunday school, youth group, our All Abilities Inclusion Ministry and all the rest of the ministries that God uses to change lives. We do this by bringing our gifts to insure that students at Alcott Elementary receive a better education and the personal attention that they need to succeed as well as to have food on the weekends. By bringing our gifts we make it possible for foster children and families to feel supported and loved. By bringing our gifts we make sure that less fortunate families have an amazing Thanksgiving and a merry Christmas. In other words, when we at Everybody's Church bring our best gifts, God uses them to make the impossible, possible, changing lives for the better.

All of us who are here this morning stand in the great tradition of God's people who are called to bring our best gifts to God in order that the impossible becomes possible. So my challenge to you is to ask yourselves this question, "What best gifts ought I to be bringing to God in order that God use them to change lives for the better here and around the world?"