**Hungry Bellies, Hungry Souls**

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| **Slide** | **Sermon** |
| 1 | Title Slide |
| 2 | The disciples are obviously worried! They went to the lakeside for a bit of rest. They have come hoping for a private picnic with their Master. But their hopes are doomed to disappointment. The keel of their boat hardly touched the shore before they begin to be besieged by a great multitude of troubled people . . . people wanting healing; people who have hungry souls. These take up all the Master’s time, so they have not a single moment alone with him. The hours are hectic and toilsome, even beyond the ordinary. At last the shadow of evening begins to descend, but those people refuse to leave. By this time, they have become a serious problem. Having been all day without food, they now have hungry bellies!  But there is no bread to be had at this lonely spot and even if there was bread, these disciples had no money to buy it. |
| 3 | Then to make matters worse, Jesus seems entirely unconscious of their plight. He is so busy with his teaching that he seems to have forgotten where he is. He’s so taken up with his work of healing and feeding their hungry souls that he has lost all track of time. They love Jesus and there’s no end to their admiration for him. But they don’t quite trust him. They must feel that he needs a good bit of managing. In fact, at present, he is more a liability than an asset, therefore there is nothing to do but take matters into their own hands and make the best of a hard situation. |
| 4 | Now this is a very human story. It’s also very modern. It doesn’t simply belong to far-off yesterday it belongs here today.  Life is constantly bringing us both as individuals and as groups into trying and perplexing situations.  Again, and again we come to veils through which we cannot see and doors to which we find no key.  Over and over again we are met by demands for which our resources seem entirely inadequate. |
| 5 | In fact this perfectly describes our predicament with the Corona virus! No one is sure how to counter it, destroy it, yet! So, we use methods that have worked in the past to keep it from spreading to everyone: Social distancing, washing hands often for 20 seconds with soap and water, wearing masks when around other people, wear gloves because the virus can life for days on hard surfaces! Even with all this we are still seeing the infection and the death rates continue to rise. |
| 6 | Some of us are even facing other such situations even now! And, sad as it is, for some, our religion does NOT seem to be doing very much for us!  Even our Lord appears to be either totally unmindful of our pathetic plight or as inadequate to its demands as we ourselves. |
| 7 | We – just as the disciples – feel that the whole burden must rest upon our shoulders and our's alone.  No wonder we are worried!  But what are we to do about it?  What did the disciples resolve to do? |
| 8 | They resolved to escape!  Not very heroic – Not very smart – But seemed logical!  We, too, seek escape by various methods when the problems of our lives become too demanding!  Some folks are leaving town to go somewhere different hoping that they will not be exposed to the virus! But to me there seems to be very few such places. Others are just tired of it all and are going to the Florida beaches, even some in NC/SC and just joining the crowd to soak up sun and not worrying about getting the virus.  How do we seek to escape? |
| 9 | First Method – We employ the same method of escape as did the disciples – “Passing the buck!”  “Send the multitude away!” Whatever is done for these hungry bellies will have to be done by someone else” How familiar!   1. Many who think the financial responsibility for supporting the church is someone else’s -so we pass the buck to those that are more affluent. 2. Many who believe that it’s someone else’s job to be spiritual – I’ll clean, I’ll be here on Sunday’s, I’ll serve as a trustee, or on the Council but I’ll pass that buck to someone else that likes reading the Bible and study. 3. And the opposite is true, some like the seclusion of study and Bible reading and pass the buck of getting out there in the midst of poverty and the messiness of working with people to help others. 4. And some will say – that’s someone else’s job – I’m too busy”   Yes, we know well how to escape the problems and requests on our lives by passing the buck. |
| 10 | 2. Another way of escaping is by simply running from hard situations.  There are lots of examples in the Bible of people running away from hard situations.   1. Jeremiah had an appointment he didn’t like. His congregation almost drove him to desperation. He wished for a faraway place to go – to get away from it all! 2. Another prophet was appointed to Nineveh – of all places – but just as Jeremiah, he did not like his appointment. Therefore, he resolved to run away. “Jonah rose up to flee unto Tarshish from the presence of the Lord.”   Faced with demands that they felt unable to meet, these prophets wanted to escape by running. |
| 11 | EX: In 1981, a Minnesota radio station reported a story about a stolen car in California. Police were staging an intense search for the car and the driver, even to the point of placing announcements on local radio stations to contact the thief.  For on the front seat of the stolen car sat a box of crackers that, unknown to the thief, were laced with poison. The car owner had intended to use the crackers as rat bait.  Now the police and the car owner were more interested in apprehending the thief to save his life than to recover the car.  Like the thief we often resort to running as a way to escape those hard situations in our lives – even when those very situations could very well be God’s way of coming to our rescue and helping us to grow in our faith and relationship to Christ. Recall what Jeremiah told the people?  Jeremiah 29:11 "'For I Know The Plans I Have For You' Declares the Lord, 'Plans to Prosper You and Not to Harm You, Plans to Give You Hope and a Future. |
| 12 | This bring me to the question that this story of Jesus brings - Why do we seek escape? Why did the disciples?  It was NOT because they were altogether selfish  It was NOT because they were entirely indifferent to the needs of the people. They were genuinely concerned.  It was NOT because the crowd’s physical needs were not their business.  Then **why** did they undertake to send these hungry folks away to help themselves? |
| 13 | It was because they felt there was nothing else, they could do! They had nothing to offer and thus:  No other way out!  They were plain, practical men. There were 5000+. They rationally took stock of the present food supply – 5 loaves and 2 fishes and compared the supply to the demand – 5000 men plus women and children – and facing their pathetic poverty, they passed the following resolution:  “Whereas we are in a desperate situation to which we are entirely inadequate, be it resolved that there is, but one sane course open to us and that is to send the multitude away.”  It was a unanimous vote in favor of the proposal!  How modern! I can see our Council and practically any other church making the same decision! Can’t you?  It is quite evident that these disciples, though quite willing to serve, were at once hopeless and helpless in the presence of the pressing demands of the hour.  Why were they so helpless in the face of this demand?  The overestimated their poverty! We have here but 5 loaves and 2 fishes!  Really, is that all they had? Was 5 loaves and 2 fishes all their resources to meet this problem? |
| 14 | They forgot about Jesus – their Lord and Master – who had been healing and casting out demons. Had he ever failed them? Had he let them down?  Instead of looking to material wealth alone, why not look to Him? But they couldn’t look beyond what they physically had in hand! |
| 15 | I’m convinced this bring us face to face with one of the greatest weaknesses of the modern Church today!  We have far saner views of the Bible than the church of yesteryear.  We have clearer understanding of historical Jesus. Our beliefs, for the most part, are more intellectually respectable.  But in spite of all this, we are sadly lacking the dynamic!  Intellectually sane, we are often spiritually impotent.  In our efforts to preach to scientific minds, we have been frightened to death by anything that smacks of the supernatural – like miracle stories.  Sometimes, therefore, we have left God out altogether!  And even when we leave God in the picture, God becomes merely a reflection of humanity – just as powerless as we are. How up to date this story is today! |
| 16 | Story of Elisha – He is staying in Dothan with his servant when at night the army surrounds the city to capture him. His servant is scared witless! What are we going to do?  Elisha says pray – But he doesn’t pray as the servant expects. He prays that the eyes of the frightened servant might be opened. When that prayer is answered, the servant comes to realize something of God’s infinite resources; an army of angels surrounding them, and his fear gives way to courage and faith. |
| 17 | So, it is with the disciples when they realized they didn’t have to meet this situation alone. What seemed unsolvable now concludes in victory –  Why? Because Jesus took over and led the way. Jesus made the difference for 2 reasons.  First, He had a simple, positive plan!  Unlike what the disciples thought, Jesus in the midst of feeding hungry souls did realize that bellies were hungry too. The whole responsibility didn’t lay on the shoulders of the disciples.  **Jesus’ plan didn’t send people away. Jesus’ plan was to take resources available and allow the Spirit of God to work with the disciples’ help.** |
| 18 | That’s Good News to us today –  God still has a plan for the world and for each of us.  Maybe quote it using slide 11 (at end of it)l  Overall that plan is the bring each of us and the world into His Kingdom.  More particularly, God has a plan for your life that seeks to bring you into on ever closer walk with Christ.  This doesn’t mean you have only one groove in which you are to live like it or not.  No this means that God has many options from which to choose. We are to choose to serve God no matter the groove.  Second, Jesus’ plan involved the disciples. Jesus didn’t feed them by himself. Jesus and the disciples did it together.  Jesus instructed, gave thanks. The disciples organized and carried out Jesus instructions.  Miracles continue to happen when we make this connection. |
| 19 | Making this connection means God depends upon us. We are God’s voice, hands, feet, heart. |
| 20 | We depend upon God for spirit and power. Without God’s spirit – problems will be too great, and we’ll run or frustrate ourselves with human solutions and give up.  But together we’ll convey God’s saving grace. |
| 21 | There are millions of hungry bellies in this world of ours and through the vast technology of today we hear about it every day.  There are even more hungry souls – We know this because of the violence, wars, drug use, abuse and disintegrating families, panic and blaming others, etc., etc.  But Jesus has come to make a difference – to feed hungry bellies , to feed hungry souls. |
| 22 | It takes you and me and the whole church to do it. God has chosen us to feed hungry bellies and hungry souls – to feed each other and to feed the world.(lst 2 weeks we have collected food for Backpack ministries to feed some hungry bellies. We are streaming our worship in hopes of feeding some hungry souls.)  With God’s Spirit and our willingness to give ourselves, God’s Kingdom will grow, starting here at Center UMC. Will we give ourselves? |