

July 31st 2011 "A Little Child Shall Lead Them" series #2 John 6:1-14
"The Value of a Gift"

I have called this series "And a Little Child Shall Lead Them" on account of the example the young girl we heard about last week, and the young boy in our story today, give us as adults. Their stories prove what God can do through anybody who desires to serve Him. It is a fallacy for anyone of us to believe that God cannot use us to further His work in some way because we are not as gifted as some, or because we are young in our faith, or have limited knowledge of spiritual things. If we are willing God will find a way of using us that may well have the same impact that the gift of that boy had in John chapter 6.

The occasion was the miracle that we know as the Feeding of the 5,000. A miracle that is so important that it is listed in each one of the four Gospels and leads on in John's Gospel to Jesus' teaching about Himself as the Bread of Life. A miracle that reveals **the Importance of that one young boy.**

When Jesus first introduced the thought of feeding this huge crowd to His disciples, He knew that He had given them a task that they would see as impossible. Jesus was not surprised at the reaction He got from His disciples. John 6:7 has Philip responding:-

"Don't you know that it would take almost a year's wages just to buy only a little bread for each of these people?" (CEV)

Not a strong vote of confidence is it, in the power of Jesus to work through them. But Jesus wasn't put off by that response. Mark's account tells us that He then said to His disciples:- Mark 6:38

"How many loaves do you have?" he asked. "Go and see."

And God still does that to His people today. He still gives us tasks that seem impossible to us, and often we respond as the disciples did with an initial, 'Lord that's not possible'. But the Lord doesn't give up on us. He keeps on bringing the task into our heads and our hearts with the command, 'Go and see', until we begin to trust Him to do more in and through us than what we would ever ask or think of.

(Last Thursday we had breakfast club followed by the Over 55's and as we made use of just about every inch of our buildings here, I

commented to Terry Baker how blessed we were as a church to have such premises. And then I recalled the time more than 10 years ago when God first put into our hearts the task of extending our buildings. And our immediate response was, "it's not possible". We don't have the money, the manpower, even the need. But God said to us then, "Go and see". And we did, and God started to do things through us that astounded many of us, and today we are seeing this building used greatly for the work of His kingdom.)

The disciples also went to see, and that was when they found this young lad with his lunch box. The scholars reckon he was between the age of 6 and 12. The meal he had was a poor boys lunch. The rich had bread made out of wheat. The poor had theirs made out of barley. He had 5 small rolls and two little sardine size fish. He was important because of what he had to offer, although others around him would have seen his food as too insignificant to even mention. Yet Jesus had chosen to use him and his offering to perform one of His greatest miracles.

Could Jesus have fed the 5,000 without involving this little boy? Of course He could have. In His temptations He was challenged to turn stones into bread, and He never said He couldn't do that if he wanted to. He chose not to use His power in that way. But when He asked Philip about buying bread the scripture tells us, He already knew what He would do, and I reckon He also knew that He would use this little boys lunch.

This young fellow is important in God's plan, not because of the great gift He gave, for it was a meager gift in many ways, but because Jesus chose to use Him in His work.

God delights to use you and me, and that makes us an important part of what He is doing on this earth. You might consider what you do as very small. You will probably never get much acclamation for doing it from others. They may not even notice that you taught that Sunday School class, helped out at kids Klub, did the washing for someone in need or cooked a meal for a family in crisis. Like this young lad whose name we don't even know, you too will never see your name in lights. But God knows your acts of love and service done unto Him, and to Him you will always be so important.

And God also sees your gift as important. What that little boy gave to Jesus wasn't really worth much, but its value in the hands of Jesus was immense. It was immense because of what Jesus did with it. He used it to feed five thousand hungry people. It was immense because of what lay behind the gift. Love and sacrifice.

When Andrew returned from his 'going and seeing' he was not alone. John tells us in 6:9 what Andrew said to Jesus:-

9 "Here is a boy with five small barley loaves and two small fish, but how far will they go among so many?"

'***Here is a boy***'.....Andrew did not just bring back the boy's lunch—the boy came too. He wanted to be there in person to give His gift to Jesus. As far as he was concerned it was Jesus who needed his lunch for Himself, and he was thrilled about that. He had seen what Jesus did for others, heard his words, and, in what I sense was a growing affection for Jesus, he came near to offer Him his small lunch.

And for that boy this was no small gift. It was his lunch. Something he should have eaten some hours before but caught up in all that was happening around him, he hadn't done so. No doubt he was feeling rather hungry by now, but even so he is prepared to give all his food. The whole lot to Jesus.

The gifts the Lord delights to receive from us whether they be in the form of time, of ability, of material objects, are those given out of love for Him and at cost to us. The size of the gift is the least important part, for if He could use a small lunch to feed thousands, then He can use what we lay before Him in an amazing way. As long as we give out of love holding nothing back.

The other encouraging thing about the boy's gift was that it led to the involvement of others. Principally it was used by Jesus to feed the crowd who were then so inspired that they began to talk about Jesus as, "the Prophet who is to come into the world"(v14). But in a secondary sense his small gift motivated the Lord's disciples. Andrew may have been very hesitant in offering it to Jesus for, as he himself said in v9—"***but how far will they go among so many?***" Yet after Jesus had gladly accepted the five loaves and two fishes from the lad, the twelve were enthusiastic helpers of Jesus and became co-workers with Him in His miraculous act.

The boy's gift was not much to speak of. A few small barley loaves and two small fish. But it was exactly what Jesus needed and by his giving he encouraged and enabled others to be involved with the Lord in the work of the Kingdom.

(There is a great and ancient parable about an old crow who was out in the wilderness and very thirsty. He had not had anything to drink in a long time. He came to a jug that had a little water in the bottom of it. The old crow reached his beak into the jug to get some of that water, but his beak wouldn't quite touch the water. So what did he do? He started picking up pebbles one at a time and dropping them into the jug. And as more and more pebbles accumulated in the bottom of the jug the water rose in the bottle until finally the old crow was able to drink all that he desired. That's a parable of how God has chosen to work out His plan in our world, and how He worked in this story. Each believer dropping in our own little pebble—be it the young boy giving his lunch—Andrew taking him and his lunch to Jesus—the rest of the disciples organizing the people and giving out the food.

Or in our case it may be someone teaching a Sunday School class; another serving as a deacon—another visiting a lonely neighbor—another being part of the music team—another welcoming people on the door—another mentoring at the school; and so on, and so on. Doing what we can to serve Jesus may not seem all that important at the time, but as the pebbles accumulate in the bottom of the jug, and the water rises, God builds His kingdom and brings his plan to fruition.)

This story reminds us that we should never underestimate the value of the gift we offer to God, whether that gift is our time, our abilities, our possessions. If we give it to Him out of love and sacrifice then He will use it, as he used the lunch of a young boy, to build his kingdom, and to encourage and motivate others in their service for Him.