

Lent 4 (2024)

Tony was black and homeless. I met him while walking with three clergy companions through Citadel Square in Charleston . . . not on my recent trip in January, but a few years ago.

He needed something to eat. Of course, my friends and I took out our wallets and gave him enough to get a decent meal.

He thanked us and rode off on his bike, and we continued on to the restaurant where we were planning to eat.

Outside this restaurant was another homeless man. He too was black and his name Tony.

As with the first Tony, he needed something to eat and asked us to save whatever was left on our plates for him.

Being hungry and having no means to get food is not a happy situation to be in.

Most of us, if confronted with a hungry person, would do what we could to provide what was needed.

In today's passage from Luke 6, we find Jesus doing just that, only He is not dealing with one or two hungry 'Tonys' but 5000 plus.

Those He fed that day were not permanently homeless. As John mentions the Passover was near, the great multitude *could* have been made up of Galilean pilgrims on their way to Jerusalem for the great festival. Seeing Jesus, they seized the opportunity to hear Him.

Regardless of how they had come to be there, what is clear is that they were hungry and needed to be fed.

The first thing I wish to call to your attention is that it is Jesus Himself who first takes note of their need for food. He turns to Philip, one of the Twelve, and says:

“Whence shall we buy bread, that these may eat?”

To which Philip, who was apparently a very pragmatic, number-oriented person, responds:

“Two hundred pennyworth of bread is not sufficient for them, that every one of them may take a little.”

From a purely human standpoint, Philip is right. He accurately assesses the situation. Even if there had been a Food Lion or Ingles or Publix around the corner, the cost of feeding such a crowd with even a meager fare would have taken an incredible amount of money. The amount mentioned, two hundred denarii, is more than six month's wages.

What Philip is saying is: “There’s no way.”

What he does NOT factor into his assessment is that the One standing before him is greater than Moses through whom God had fed a similarly large crowd, not just on one occasion but over many years.

Philip had seen Jesus do what only God could do on a number of occasions. Likely he had been present when Jesus turned water into wine at the wedding of Cana of Galilee. But now his vision was earthbound. He was thinking solely in human terms . . . what he as a man could do.

Are we not at times like Philip?

We find ourselves in a desperate situation, and instead turning to God for help we try to sort matters out on our own.

Are you dealing with any impossible situations in your life at this time? If you are, bring them before the One who has no limits.

Say, “I don’t have a clue which way to go or what to do, but I know you have untold resources at your disposal, please take charge of this situation.”

In the word of Samuel Wesley’s anthem:

Lead me, Lord, lead me in thy
righteousness;
make thy way plain before my face.
For it is thou, Lord, thou, Lord, only,
that makest me dwell in safety.

Jesus brought the situation of the hungry crowd to Philip’s attention in order to test him. He already knew what He was going to do.

I think it is fair to say Philip failed the test that day, but we don't have to. We need to follow Andrew's lead.

Like Andrew, who enters the story at this point, we need to bring whatever we have and lay it before Jesus and see what he will do with it. In Andrew's case, it was a little boy's boxed lunch.

Before I move on, I need to go back to something I said earlier. It was Jesus who first took note that the people were hungry and needed something to eat.

What we can take away from this part of the story is that the God we meet in Jesus is interested in more than 'spiritual' things. We in the Church should be as well.

Announcing the Gospel of salvation, making disciples of all nations, bringing God's Word Written to the people of our day, is certainly of

paramount importance. But, if you see someone who needs a meal or a load of firewood, don't walk away. Jump in there and do what you can. This too is Gospel work.

Many at St. Luke's are doing this already. You volunteer at the local food bank. You work in the community garden. Once a month you distribute food at the apartment complex down the road from here. Carry on. Be assured that with such work God is well pleased.

Moving on, we find in today's reading Jesus doing what only God can do – taking a little bread and a few fish and multiplying them.

This miracle was a sign to the people present that day that God was in their midst . . . that the Kingdom of sin, Satan and death was crumbling . . . that God's new day was dawning.

More than that, it was a summons to believe and follow. Those present had to make a

decision. Was Jesus the Christ in whom the living God was present and active, or was He not?

People still have to decide. Who do YOU say Jesus is? The real deal or an impostor?

But we need to go one step beyond bare intellectual assent. We need to become a worker together with Him. We see this principle illustrated in today's passage.

Jesus did what only He as the Son of God could do. He multiplied the loaves and fish, but, having done so, He hands them over to the disciples to distribute.

Paul in 1 Corinthians 3:9, writes: "For we are labourers together with God. We see the disciples taking on that role that day.

Look down at your hands and say, these are no longer mine to do with them as I please. God

had need of them. “I’m ready, Lord. Give me a job.”

As you can see, today’s passage is full of practical instruction. Allow me to recap the main points.

--With God there are no impossible situations. What is impossible with us is possible with Him. Bring your perplexities to Him without delay. ///

--The God we meet in Jesus is a God of heaven and earth. He gives both the bread of the Eucharist and the bread on the table at lunch time. As Gospel people, we should not divide these two. Tell people that Jesus saves, but also, if they are hungry physically, feed them. Don’t put asunder what God has joined together. ///

--Finally, and following on from this thought, we are called to be workers together

with God. Give Him your heart, but also your hands.

In closing, there are Tonys all around us, opportunities for witness and service everywhere we look. Let's respond as Jesus responded. Let's feed them with the bread of heaven and earth.

God's work, our hands.

