

“THE BIG PICNIC”

Children’s Sabbath

(The first part of this sermon was used only at the 11 AM service, and was a skit for the Pre-K through 5th Graders).

“Hi! Would you like to have some lunch? I’ll share my fish and bread. It’s not much. It’s just a little. Oh, that’s right; you have just had breakfast, so you aren’t hungry. But if you were, I would share what I have.

That’s what I did that day we all went to hear the wonderful teacher, Jesus. Jesus and His friends sailed across the Lake Galilee and went up on a hill and sat down. Many people followed Jesus and His friends because He helped us understand God...and ourselves...as no one else had ever done. When Jesus saw all the people, He felt sorry for us because we were like lost sheep who didn’t have a shepherd. So we listened to Jesus and He taught us all day long. He said things like: “Heaven is like a beautiful pearl. It’s worth more than anything else in the whole world.”

After a while, Jesus told His disciples to feed us. Philip, one of His disciples, said: “But Jesus, it would take a lot of money to buy food for these people!”

Well, I thought, “My little lunch isn’t much, but perhaps my two fish and five loaves could feed a few of us.” I didn’t think Mom and Dad would mind if I gave it to Jesus to help others. At least, I hoped they wouldn’t mind. You never know with big people some times. So I took my lunch to Andrew, another one of Jesus’ friends, and he took it to Jesus. Andrew said, “This little boy will share his meal, but it’s not enough.”

Jesus took my little lunch and said, “Tell all the people to sit down for dinner.” Jesus took the bread and fish, He looked up to heaven and thanked God...you know like we do before each meal...except we bow our heads because Jesus is closer to God than we are. Anyway, then Jesus divided the food and gave it to His followers. They shared it with the hungry people, and guess what? Everyone had plenty of food to eat. It was a miracle! Jesus gave us food for our hearts to make us better people; and gave us food for our bodies so we could live His lessons of love. We had a great big picnic on the hill that day; and there were twelve baskets left over.

Do you know what I learned about Jesus and God that day? I learned that “little is much when God is in it.” I may be small but I learned that

Jesus can do big things with little people, too.

By the way, have a great day...every day, and remember to share.
Jesus can do a lot with a little.

The Gospel of John is the only gospel which does not include the text of Jesus blessing the children. Remember it? “People were bringing little children to Him to have Him touch them and pray for them; but the disciples rebuked them. When Jesus saw this, He was indignant and said to them, ‘Let the little children come to Me; do not stop them; for it is to such as these that the kingdom of God belongs. I tell you the truth, anyone who will not receive the kingdom of God like a little child will never enter it.’ And He took them in His arms, laid His hands on them, and blessed them.”

As I considered today’s gospel text, I wondered if John’s mentioning the gift of five loaves and two fish from the young boy was his way of emphasizing the importance of children in general and to the family of faith specifically. All four gospels mention the feeding of the five thousand. But only John mentions the boy as being a part of the miracle.

There is another interesting connection here. At the end of his gospel, John states *this* main purpose of his account of Jesus’ life: “These things are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that by believing you may have life in His name.” This sets the boy’s giving in a long line of people who, in Christ, present and live the gospel in all its richness. All that we know about the boy is this vital truth that relates to all God’s children: when we give all that we are and have to Jesus, it is always enough to fulfill every need. People who do great things for God often remain nameless. Yet what they do defines the essence of what it means to be an obedient child of God.

What we do with what we hear reveals what we really know from the heart. Our nameless little friend encourages us to live the gospel we hear and think we know. Bible study is not meant to merely inform us - it is meant to transform us. What this lad knew from his heart was that he had never known anyone like Jesus. He knew Jesus loved, cared about and included children, as they are, in the faith community.

Now forget about the spilt milk; the endless, “Are we there yet?” question or “I didn’t do it!” “She started it!” Children are precious to God and to us. In their innocence, they remind us of the qualities of faith we are to live before and with our children as “kingdom people.” In child-like

faith, we rejoice in knowing that grace is a gift not achieved by human

effort; but a blessing received by those who, in complete trust, lean on the everlasting arms...without claim or merit, resting in God's redeeming love.

The church which embraces this truth is on the road to being a people and a place which rejoices that education, in God's truth, is a life long adventure that ends only when Jesus says: "Well done, My good and faithful servant." Baptism and confirmation are a commencement call which never ends. Therefore, education in the Word is not just for children. It is for the entire faith community continuing to hunger and thirst after righteousness. Each of us is not only called to study the Word/curriculum; but to realize that we *are* the curriculum for our children and each other. What they see us do is what they remember.

In her book, *Fashion Me A People*, Maria Harris says, "In Communion and community, in worship and prayer, in proclaiming the Word by living it, in service and outreach, and in teaching and learning, we educate and are educated fully in (and for) ministry. Together, we, the whole community, are "pilgrims in time" educating and empowering, and engaged in ministry in the midst of the world." In supporting the nurturing begun in the home, Ms. Harris continues, "The church does not *have* an educational program; it *is* an education program. In this way of living, speaking, learning, and worshiping together, we realize and rejoice in our own gifts, talents and powers. We become partners with God and with one another in the work begun in Genesis." As built up and equipped children and adults, we join God's world-wide big picnic in a lifelong commitment to serve as lads and lasses willing to share our loaves and fish.

A ministerial colleague in Newville, who loves to sit at table, and who considers himself the original Pillsbury Dough-Boy, once said to me, "Myrtle, I am so glad that God loves fat people." My skinny inner voice retorted, "Hey Jeff, God loves all people regardless of shape and size." But he continued, "I know you think I'm talking about weight. I'm talking about faith. God is very pleased with those who remain Faithful, Available and Teachable. Now that's good FAT, he said." May this be the life-long quest of all God's children.

And may we always remember that people and their gifts are never too little or seemingly insignificant to be used by God. Kittie J. Suffield wrote a beautiful hymn entitled, "*Little Is Much When God Is in It.*" Hear the words of the first verse and refrain: "In the harvest field now ripened There's a work for all to do. Hark! The voice of God is calling, To the

harvest calling you. Does the place you're called to labor Seem so small and little known? It is great if God is in it, And He'll not forget His own. Little

is much, when God is in it! Labor not for wealth or fame; There's a crown-- and you can win it, If you'll go in Jesus' name."

As we go and grow in faith together, may our children, see in us the curriculum of faith and love that feeds and shares and reaches for that upward call of God in Christ Jesus which blesses the world and gives glory to God. That is the really, really big picnic. It is what Jesus has always intended because it lifts hearts and eyes to enjoy God who is the Source, Provider and Sustainer of all that is good. And look! There is enough for all...with a lot left over. Thanks be to God! Amen.