

**Here I Am? — Rev. Denise Stone**

**Text: John 6:1-21**

**FIRST PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH BIG FLATS NY,**

**07-25-2021**

“Needs and compassion.” Last week, “needs and compassion,” were at the core of the sermon. As a church, as individuals, we look for needs, we have compassion on those with the need, we take action: “feelings in action.”

In last week’s scriptures from Mark 6 we saw examples where Jesus identified a need. Jesus had compassion. Jesus acted. Jesus gave us examples of “feelings in action”: he saw the disciples - weary after a long day - and “He said to them, ‘Come away to a deserted place all by yourselves and rest a while.’” Jesus continued on, showing compassion to the crowds by teaching the people, by healing the sick.

In this week’s text, we have an extension of this theme: Jesus sees a need. Jesus has compassion. Jesus takes actions. Let’s take a more detailed look into God’s word. Take a look even beyond the big miracles of the feeding giant crowds and of walking on water, and look at how Jesus’s *disciples* contribute to the mission. How, when, and why does Jesus call the disciples into action?

Hear these words from John 6, verses 1-21:

**6** After this Jesus went to the other side of the Sea of Galilee, also called the Sea of Tiberias. <sup>2</sup> A large crowd kept following him, because they saw the signs that he was doing for the sick. <sup>3</sup> Jesus went up the mountain and sat down there with his disciples. <sup>4</sup> Now the Passover, the festival of the Jews, was near. <sup>5</sup> When he looked up and saw a large crowd coming toward him, Jesus said to Philip, “Where are we to buy bread for these people to eat?” <sup>6</sup> He said this to test him, for he himself knew what he was going to do. <sup>7</sup> Philip answered him, “Six months’ wages would not buy enough bread for each of them to get a little.” <sup>8</sup> One of his disciples, Andrew, Simon Peter’s brother, said to him, <sup>9</sup> “There is a boy here who has five barley loaves and two fish. But what are they among so many people?” <sup>10</sup> Jesus said, “Make the people sit down.” Now there was a great deal of grass in the place; so they sat down, about five thousand in all. <sup>11</sup> Then Jesus took the loaves, and when he had given thanks, he distributed them to those who were seated; so also the fish, as much as they wanted. <sup>12</sup> When they were satisfied, he told his disciples, “Gather up the fragments left over, so that nothing may be lost.” <sup>13</sup> So they gathered them up, and from the fragments of the five barley loaves, left by those who had eaten, they filled twelve

baskets. <sup>14</sup> When the people saw the sign that he had done, they began to say, “This is indeed the prophet who is to come into the world.”

<sup>15</sup> When Jesus realized that they were about to come and take him by force to make him king, he withdrew again to the mountain by himself.

<sup>16</sup> When evening came, his disciples went down to the sea, <sup>17</sup> got into a boat, and started across the sea to Capernaum. It was now dark, and Jesus had not yet come to them. <sup>18</sup> The sea became rough because a strong wind was blowing. <sup>19</sup> When they had rowed about three or four miles, they saw Jesus walking on the sea and coming near the boat, and they were terrified. <sup>20</sup> But he said to them, “It is I; do not be afraid.” <sup>21</sup> Then they wanted to take him into the boat, and immediately the boat reached the land toward which they were going.<sup>i</sup>

The Word of the Lord

**Thanks be to God.**

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Before we go back to the scripture passage and delve into the ministries performed by the disciples, I want you to keep these questions in the forefront of your mind:

- To what ministries does God call me?
- Am I open not only to the big requests, the big needs, but am willing to see and to act upon the small opportunities that God puts in my path?

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Today's passage from John's Gospel are the two miracle stories that we did not focus in on in last week's passages from Mark's Gospel – Jesus feeding the five thousand and Jesus walking on the water.

These are fantastic events in scripture. I would think that even many who are not Christians may know of these stories. We, who have been in church for any length of time, have probably had Sunday School lessons or heard sermons on these miracles. We often look only at what Jesus did – multiplying food for the masses and walking on the water.

Let's focus in on the feeding of the five thousand.

A large crowd continues to follow Jesus. They want Jesus to heal their sick and to do other "signs." Jesus looked at them and had compassion.

Starting in verse 5, Jesus calls to one of his disciples, Phillip, and asks him

"Where are we to buy bread for these people to eat?" <sup>6</sup> He said this to test him, for he himself knew what he was going to do. <sup>7</sup> Philip answered him, "Six months' wages would not buy enough bread for each of them to get a little." <sup>8</sup> One of his disciples, Andrew, Simon Peter's brother, said to him, <sup>9</sup> "There is a boy here who has five barley loaves and two fish. But what are they among so many people?"

Jesus has involved his disciples in the miracle he is about to do. He calls to Phillip and then Andrew reports about one boy's lunch.

This little bit of food does not appear to be significant in the eyes of Andrew.

Jesus then has the disciples get the crowd to sit down on the hillside.

When the people were seated, Jesus took this boy's lunch – five small barley loaves and two fish – gave thanks and blessed the food.

Jesus then had the disciples pass out the food as he broke it.

Verses 12 and 13,

<sup>12</sup> When they were satisfied, he told his disciples, "Gather up the fragments left over, so that nothing may be lost." <sup>13</sup> So they gathered them up, and from the fragments of the five barley loaves, left by those who had eaten, they filled twelve baskets.

A basket of food for each of the twelve disciples.

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The disciples were the hands and feet of this miracle. Jesus did the miraculous work of multiplying the food, but Jesus intentionally involved his followers in this miracle.

- The disciples were asked about the need and how to meet it.

- The disciples were active participants in “crowd management”, and
- in distributing the food to the people.
- They were responsible for gathering in the leftovers, the clean-up. Twelve baskets full were gathered. One for each of them.

Could Jesus have done this miracle of feeding over five thousand people without the disciples? Sure. But he chose not to. Jesus involved his followers – in normal and small ways – and Jesus did the miracle.

The disciples did not know they were going to be part of something that would be remembered for all time. They were just doing the seemingly mundane tasks that Jesus asked of them. Yet, those seemingly mundane tasks, were necessary elements of this miraculous event.

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As I look around this room, I see followers of Jesus. Many of whom do what they might consider to be normal, small jobs within the walls of this building.

- We have people who spent time here yesterday doing some property cleaning and maintenance.
- We have people who faithfully work keeping the sound and PowerPoint running during our services.
- We have people who regularly clean the building so it will be in good shape for the activities of the week.

- We have people who volunteer to be here on Tuesday mornings to help with the Food Pantry.

I would dare to say, these people do not see themselves as doing anything spectacular in God's Kingdom. Yet – they are needed in God's Kingdom.

God **can do** miracles without us. God **chooses** to use us.

You may not see the work you do as a miracle – but do we really know the impact we have? Probably not.

A couple of months ago we gathered on a fifth Sunday and put together “blessing bags” for the patients of the Falck Cancer Center. This was a simple task. We do not know what kind of impact this work had on those blessed by our efforts.

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Normal, mundane tasks for GOD'S KINGDOM.

***There is no job too big or too small in God's Kingdom.***

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In a few weeks, we will have an opportunity to share school supplies with students and teachers in the Odessa Montour Schools. Ahead of time, you will be gathering the supplies that we will divide out and share with others. Then we will gather here on the fifth Sunday in August to package up the supplies.

These do not sound like big jobs and yet, God has called us to this task.

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***There is no job too big or too small in God's Kingdom.***

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What if Phillip and Andrew decided the task was too hard and walked away? What if the whole group of disciples saw the little boy's lunch and decided Jesus was crazy and did not help with the small tasks that needed to be done?

The story would have been different.

But they didn't walk away. They were willing to be used by their teacher, our Savior.

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When I was young, 12 or 13, I thought you had to volunteer to be a missionary in Africa to serve God. I did not really see my Sunday School teachers as servants of God. I probably thought my Pastors were serving God, but I doubt I realized that the people who cleaned the church building were serving God.

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We often discount the things we do as insignificant in God's Kingdom. Yet, it is the little things that need to be done that allow for ***all the work*** that God can accomplish through us.

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At the beginning of the sermon, I asked you to keep two questions in the forefront of your mind:



- To what ministries does God call me? And,
- Am I open not only to the big requests, the big needs, but am willing to see and to act upon the small opportunities that God puts in my path?

The examples of work for God's Kingdom I have given so far have been within the walls of this building. What other ministries does God call you to? What other ministries might God call you to?

We have people who have been involved with the Community Kitchen and Samaritan Center in Elmira. The people who receive aid at those locations may view that work as a miracle in their lives.

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What other opportunities does God have available for you? Could you be called to write notes to residents at Bethany Manor or Seneca View or to volunteer your time at one of the local hospitals? What about checking in on your next door neighbor? Asking them about their day when you see them at the mailbox.

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***There is no job too big or too small in God's Kingdom.***

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We are called to look around and identify needs and to have compassion – feelings in action – and to serve as God calls us.

Will we say “Here I am” when God puts even the smallest of tasks before us?

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Please pray with me, may these words be the words of your heart this morning:

Holy God, thank you for the reminder to serve as Jesus served – mindful of needs and having compassion. Give me eyes to see the opportunities to be a servant, both big and small, that God puts before me. Use me just as you used the disciples. Help me remember that there are no small jobs in your Kingdom.

In the name of Jesus Christ we pray, Amen.

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