



Into the Neighborhood

7 – Jesus and a Little Boy's Lunch

Pastor Ted Cunningham

This is our last part of this series, *Into the Neighborhood*. Jesus became flesh and blood and dwelt among us. Jesus became flesh and blood and moved into the neighborhood, The Message paraphrase says. We've looked at all different ways that Jesus has ministered to people. Last week, Scott took us to the boundaries that we tend to set up, but that Jesus crossed to reach people.

Today, it's a really simple message. It's the only miracle of Jesus that we are going to look at in all of scripture. It's the only miracle that is repeated in all four gospels, Mathew, Mark, Luke, and John. As we look at the feeding of the 5,000, it's about Jesus and a Little Boy's Lunch. Just to be clear right off the bat, **God wants to use you to bless others**. And God blesses you when you bless others.

So, a question always pops up when we think about how God is going to use us. And we'll answer the question: How will God use me. That's why we've done this series. How, in your neighborhood, is God using you. Among your neighbors and with what he's called you to do, what are you doing with this series? How are you living this out? To me, a more important question... And this message today is about God doing a lot with a little. And there is a more important question to ask than how will God use me? And it's what will I do with what I have? What will I do with what I have been given? How will I use that? It's a far more important question, but how many of us are good at excuses.

We come up with more excuses and I have plenty of excuses of why I'm not going to talk to that guy over there and why I'm going to keep driving. I could stop and say hi to that neighbor, but I'm just going to keep going. We have excuse after excuse after excuse. And I think a lot of times when it comes to making a difference for the kingdom and God using us in the kingdom and God using us to bless other people, probably the number one thing we'll hear is this excuse right here: **"I don't have much to offer."** Today's story is for you. Today's miracle is for you. It is for all of us who think *What I have to give, it ain't much. What can God do with this?*

Well, let's look today at what God is going to do with five little loaves and two small fish, the lunch that he picks, and the one he picks it from.

I can also offer this excuse: **"Other's have more to offer."** Before you make this excuse, please keep in mind that just because someone else may have more to offer doesn't mean they will. I've read more scholars and pastors this week about the story of the little boy's lunch. You don't think that, out of thousands and thousands of people, this little boy was the only one that had food. There were plenty of others. I love how Rick Warren said it.

He goes, "There were some rich people there with some pretty nice picnic baskets, hiding." Like, "This is going to be enough to feed my family, I don't want to let people around me know that I've got this food." Jesus picks a little boy and a little boy's lunch.

I hear this too. **"It's not my time yet, I'm too young."** Well, let no one despise your youth. That's what I love about the story that we get today, this miracle, repeated four times in the gospels, is of a young boy that has no name. We don't even get his name. But God uses this young boy. You're not too young. Bring what you have. And if it's a lot of inexperience, bring that to God.

"I don't really have the education." Bring that to God. **"I don't have the degrees."** Bring that to God. He can do a lot with a little.

For the 8:30 service, **"I'm too old."** We're not even going to include this point in the next two services. Now, let's be really honest, 8:30. Come on! Some of you make the excuse, **"I offered a lot already. I've given a lot already."** I've heard these words come out of the mouths of my senior adult friends. **"It's someone else's turn."** Really? Show me a scripture where it's someone else's turn. Sure, it's some else's turn, but it's still your turn. You still have much to offer. I actually would argue that this service has so much to offer the kingdom; you have so much experience, you have a lot to offer. What can God do with all of your life experience and all of the journeys you've been on and the faith that you have lived out.

Here's where the rubber really meets the road. We're still on these excuses, **"It won't make a difference what I bring."** You don't know that. You don't know about something you do today or someone you talk to today or a conversation that you are going to have later this week. You think you had a nice conversation, but then years later, you hear about the impact of that conversation. Or how it was a turning point in someone's life, the thing that you said or did for them years and years ago. You bring what you have and let God make the difference. Let him multiply what you bring.

Some of you have given up because... This is the last one. We could do a whole message on excuses, but we won't. **"It hasn't made a difference in the past."** I'll say it again. You don't know that. You just don't know how God is using you after you walk away from interacting with a neighbor or having a conversation.

Let's jump into this. We're going to be in John 6. We're going to look at 15 verses. We're going to look at this whole story and the whole miracle. Sometimes we really focus on the 5,000, but today we see this little boy bringing what he has and it's not much. But not only does Jesus feed the 5,000, people, they get to go home with doggie bags because there is a lot left. Jesus multiplies this little bit that the boy brings.

Some time after this, Jesus crossed to the far shore of the Sea of Galilee (that is, the Sea of Tiberias)... I always love reading this in scripture because you constantly see Jesus trying to get away from people and that's not a bad thing. He loved people and he had compassion on the crowds. He did, but he was often wanting to retreat with his disciples. He was often wanting to get alone with his heavenly Father. So, when you see me dodging you at Walmart, I get that from the scripture.

2 ...and a great crowd of people followed him... Why? Scriptures says because they saw the miracles already. They couldn't get enough of this. So, now the crowd, thousands and thousands of people are following Jesus because they were... Some were intrigued by his ministry. Others wanted the benefits of his ministry. Some were just people watchers. But they are following him and it's a large crowd **...because they saw the signs he had performed by healing the sick. 3 Then Jesus went up on a mountainside and sat down with his disciples. 4 The Jewish Passover Festival was near.**

5 When Jesus looked up and saw a great crowd coming toward him, he said to Philip, "Where shall we buy bread for these people to eat?" Now, do you think Jesus saw this as an unsolvable problem? No. When you read it in other gospels, it was late in the day and it was time now for people to be getting hungry. I think one of the best lessons we get from this story is Jesus always has a solution for your problem before you even know you have a problem.

Raise your hand in here if you are a teacher. You love asking questions that you know the answer to already. And then when someone answers wrong, what do you say? Jesus is going to do it with the disciples. "That's a good answer. Not quite the answer we're looking for." You see this all the time with the way Jesus taught. I love it. "Where are we going to buy bread for these people to eat" I just want to remind you, because it's been done before. He could drop manna from heaven. He doesn't need a McDavid's, he doesn't need a strip mall. He's asking the disciples. Why? Because in every miracle, there is a lesson to be learned. There is a lesson for all of us to learn and Jesus is with his disciples so he's still teaching. He's only going to be a few years with them and he's wanting them to get this and understand how the kingdom works because the kingdom works opposite of our human thinking. He's going to show them how he can take a little and make a lot.

6 He asked this only to test him, for he already had in mind what he was going to do. Jesus wasn't looking for an answer because he already had a solution to what, to the disciples, looked like an unsolvable problem. "There is no way we can feed thousands and thousands of people out here in the middle of nowhere." But Jesus already had in mind what he was going to do.

Jesus has a solution for the problem you don't even know you have yet. So please, let's start with this idea of God using you. Jesus has plans for how he is going to use you. You need to rest in that today. And instead of asking the questions, "How? What are his plans," because we get so caught up with this. "What is God's plan for my life? What is his will for my life? Today, we're going to see, don't get so focused on that question that you forget about what you already have to bring. Think about what you have to bring, make the most of the moment you're in, give what you have.

Ephesians 2: 10 – **For we are God's handiwork, created in Christ Jesus to do good works.** Not works that we come up with or try to figure out or find, but which God has prepared in advance for us to do. This is what I love about parenting. Mom and Dad, please understand, your job as a parent is not to force your way upon your child or to turn your child to you as the source of life. They are not your source of life and you're not their source of life. You, Mom and Dad... I love this as a dad, getting to walk alongside my children to figure out, to experience with them what God has prepared in advance for them to do? What is your giftedness and personality and the resources and the energy that you have? How can you use that right now to serve God, to be used by God to bless others?

So, Jesus is going to ask this question and he's going to get some answers. And I love the answers.

7 Philip answered him, "It would take more than half a year's wages to buy enough bread for each one to have a bite!" Stop right there because this is what most of us do before we give. By the way, we are in our 20th year as a church. I've had so much fun in the last 20 years watching how God has used this little church, in this little town called Branson, to bless this community and to bless outside of this community. God has been using this little church. I keep saying *little* because that's what Joe White always calls it. "How's our little church doing over there in the Castle?" The little church is doing good.

I like that because that reminds me... This little church can do great things. But sometimes... And we may enter into a season. I think we maybe coming upon it, I don't know what God's plan is ultimately for this church, but let's not get caught up in the economics to where we're like, "I don't know, if we do that, it will cost too much. This church has never had that mentality. We've never allowed the bottom line to determine the ministry that we do. I love that in 20 years, we've never taken out a loan; we have not debt. I'm trying to think of a need that was presented to this church over the last 20 years that we said no to because we didn't have the resources. We understand as a church that God is into not addition, but multiplication. And we bring the little that we have.

I can't understand how it always works, but tithing has always been a priority for me. From the time I was very young and taught how to do this by my dad. You tithe and you just watch things being taken care of. Some of you are like, "I tithe but I'm still in a lot of debt. I need a miracle." You don't need a miracle, you need a budget. Don't get confused here. There are some things that are unsolvable. If you're living in something you think is unsolvable right now and it's really solvable, just solve it. Stop waiting on God. Do your part.

For some, you don't bring what you have. You don't bring your time, you don't bring your energy, you don't bring your resources, you don't bring your giftedness to the family of God here. You don't bring your tithe, you don't bring your offering because you're caught up in what? "Do you have any idea how much this will cost if I do this?" We're about to see it. We have haven't seen it yet, but we're about to see a little boy who gave everything that was in his hands. I want you to really see this next part. This little boy takes everything in his hands and places it in the hands of Jesus. That's a bigger deal and more things are going to happen in the hands of Jesus than in my hands, so whatever I have, I bring it.

8 Another of his disciples... While the others are doing economics. **...Andrew, Simon Peter's brother, spoke up, 9 "Here is a boy..."** Again, I remind you during this time, childhood was an insignificant period of life. Remember, the disciples were off, and Jesus rebuked them, but they would keep the children from coming to Jesus. "Don't waste his time." But now it's a boy **"...with five small barley loaves and two small fish,"** I just love everything. It can't be more *little* than this passage. The loaves are little, the fish are little, and it's a little boy. **"...but how far will they go among so many?"** So, still the questions. What good will this do among so many?

Here comes the miracle. **10 Jesus said, "Have the people sit down." There was plenty of grass in that place, and they sat down (about five thousand men were there).** I love the detail John puts into this. About five thousand men were there so we know that the children and the women weren't counted.

This is lot of people. This is what we call a multitude; it's a lot of people. Five small barley loaves and two small fish. **11 Jesus then took the loaves, gave thanks, and distributed to those who were seated as much as they wanted.** Have you ever been to someone's house for dinner and there are like ten of you sitting around the table and they bring eight chicken breasts out to the table? They say something like, "Help yourself." You're like, *Okay, who are we splitting with here? I don't know about y'all, I can do a whole one. Can anybody else do a whole one? You two pipsqueaks down there, you're splitting one of these.* Jesus gave thanks... You have to step into the scene for just a moment and think of... I just think chaos. I think absolute chaos. How is this being organized? You only have so many. Jesus was distributing it to them. **He did the same with the fish.**

12 When they had all had enough to eat, he said to his disciples, "Gather the pieces that are left over. Let nothing be wasted." 13 So they gathered them and filled twelve baskets with the pieces of the five barley loaves left over by those who had eaten.

The scripture doesn't tell us this, but I'm assuming there were a lot of people wondering what had happened. They had seen him heal the sick and now he just fed Silver Dollar City, all of those in attendance for a day, with five loaves and two fish. I think the lesson for us... There are so many lessons in here. We just never know for sure how Jesus will use us. I'll say you'll never know if you don't bring him what you have. You'll never know. And we're always questioning and giving those excuses of why we don't bring what we already have.

Talk about we're into the neighborhood conversations. What about the little details of our stories that we take time to share with someone? Have you ever done this? I bet everyone in here has a story like this especially if you have lived a few years. You had coffee with someone, or you had dinner or breakfast with someone, and you shared your story. You talked a little bit. It was just a normal meal, a normal get together. Years later, they come to you and say, "Do you remember the time you told me..?" They share something you said, and they say, "That was a turning point in my life."

I've heard from people in this church about you. I don't know if you know this but there are people in this church who have struggled over the last few years with suicidal thoughts. I don't know if you know this, but just the way you engage them on a Sunday, just the way you talk to them... I have a friend at this church who can name by name three people in this church... I don't even think these three people probably even know what they said or what they did. But it's like this individual finds these people on Sunday.

This is why, as we move into the neighborhood, we have to be very careful. You've had people come up to you and say this. "It was a turning point in my life." You walk away from that interaction going, "Man, I don't even know what I said. I don't even know what I did." This is why even as we end this series, don't overlook the small, little moments. The little conversations you have where you lean in and talk to someone and share their value with them because maybe for the last week or two or three, they've experienced no value from no one.

How about this. How about the little job we work? This is where some of you are at. "My job is purposeless. It's mundane. I'm widget making..." Really? If you are doing your work as unto the Lord,

every single job in here God can use to bless others. Right now, you're thinking, *But boy people are ungrateful.* I know they are. *People are difficult.* I know they are. *People don't want to work right now, Ted.* I know they don't. But you stay out of it. *Ted, I have a minimum wage job; you're not going to tell me that makes any difference.* Bring what little you have. If you have a minimum wage job, I'm going to put that in the category of five loaves and two fish. If you have a minimum wage job at Menards, you're getting four extra bucks an hour until July 3. I saw that this week. Does it really matter? It matters! You have to see that in the story.

This is to show you how much fun this is. Years ago, was doing comedy with a buddy in Naples, Florida. The curtain was there, and he was going on first. I'll never forget it. He opened up the curtain and looked out. It was at First Baptist Naples. Let me say that again – First Baptist Naples. It was 800 senior adults packed into this little church.

My young, punk, comedian friend looked out and went... I'll never forget it. I was standing next to him behind the curtain. He looked out and went, "Oh no, none of my jokes are going to work with these people."

I didn't know what he was talking about. I pushed him aside and opened up the curtain and I went, "Yeah! These are my people! I've got everything you need. Just do Bill O'Reilly, Sean Hannity..." I started giving him all the jokes he could give.

I thought about that. That takes me back to this little place we live in called Branson. I was with Paul Harris once and we were doing this event for six people in the crowd. I'm just going, *this is brutal, this is terrible.* How many of you had a show that had six people show up and you're first thought was *this little of an audience is no big deal. I'm not going to give everything I've got.* Do you know what I love about Paul? He went out there and he performed for six people like it was six thousand. I was nervous. There were like six people spread out in all these seats. "How do you get laughter going in this?" Paul was like, "Man, I started in Branson. I'm made for this crowd right here." I'm watching him and he killed it! Let me ask you, entertainer friends, will you give what you have, everything, whether it's six people or six hundred?

I was really embarrassed last week. I was doing this radio thing in Seattle and they said, "You need to be on Chrome." I didn't have Chrome on my laptop. I tried to download Chrome and then Chrome told me my OS was outdated by like 11 years. I am at that age. I fit the 8:30 service well. I refuse to update any of my devices; I won't do it. This watch hasn't been updated for six years. It doesn't even keep time anymore. I don't even know why I'm wearing the thing.

The guy calls me and I'm at home, upstairs, and I'm on my phone. I can't get any of this to work.

He goes, "Refresh your page."

I said, "I can't."

He said, "Why not?"

I go, "Because I'm using the phone as a hotspot and when I'm on this, that doesn't work."

He goes, "Well get on your Wi-Fi."

I went, "I don't have WIFI."

He goes, "What's your internet speed at your house?"

I go, "I don't have internet at my house."

Finally, this snooty, Seattle guy goes, "Where do you live?!"

I said, "I live in Branson, Missouri. We've had the internet for a little while, but it's not as strong as you're probably getting in downtown Seattle. I don't know, after the riots though, what your internet is like down there, but..." I like to push it a little bit, but I try not to be too rough. Guess what? The interview didn't work. I didn't have the technology able to do this darn radio interview. About an hour later, I sent him this picture and said, "I was trying very hard." (picture of a plastic chair holding a satellite dish and random pieces of equipment)

I'm here to tell you. I love this little church in this little town. I know there are a lot of places you could go, but I think if we learned anything from the pandemic, we love Branson, Missouri. I love living here. I love this little town.

So, we've got the little places that we live. The little jobs that work. I know this sounds belittling. I don't mean it to be, but I really want to drive home the point of *little*. That's how we all get. We think we don't think we have much. But what about the little children we raise.

This should have been a Mother's Day talk. It should have been a Mother's Day talk because some of you get caught up in the little details of the changing of the diapers and the potty training and you're like, *What difference am I making? Am I even contributing to society?* I love what one author I read this week said. Again, we don't know that this boy packed his own lunch or if his mom packed his lunch; don't get caught up in that detail but go with this for a second.

"Somewhere behind the story of when Jesus fed five thousand, there's a mom who packed a simple lunch for her son. She was simply taking care of her boy. She couldn't know that Jesus would turn that silent work of her hands, the gifts from her kitchen, and her faithful love for her son, into one of his greatest miracles that would be repeated in all four gospels. Moms and Dads, especially you who are tired and unnoticed, you just never know what he is up to with the little somethings you have to give." – Tricia Williford

When I read that this week, it reminded me of something that Pastor Andy Stanley in Atlanta often says. *"What if your greatest contribution to the kingdom isn't something you do, but someone you raise?"* This is why we take children's ministry here so seriously. We understand the importance and the value of it.

Let's finish this story as we close out our time together. **14 After the people saw (this miracle) the sign Jesus performed, they began to say, "Surely this is the Prophet who is to come into the world." 15 Jesus, knowing that they intended to come and make him king by force, withdrew again to a mountain by himself.**

So, the question for us today is simply this: What will people say about Jesus after he uses what you bring to the gathering?

What you have to give, make that the focus today that "I am going to put into the hands of Jesus what I have." "My reputation – it's not much, it was marred years ago. Ted, I can't believe I did it, I can't believe I said that. I can't believe people look at me the way they look at me now, knowing what I did or what I said." And as you're trying to rebuild your reputation, don't wait, give with the little reputation you have and put it in His hands.

For some of you, you're like, "My gift won't make a difference in that box or online." Give what you have. Stop comparing yourself to what others have and the capacity they have and the gifts that they bring. Why? Because God uses what you bring. He's going to use that to bless others. If you want to be a blessing to other people, bring what you have.

Here's the key, the bottom line of the whole morning. **You are responsible for what you bring, not how God uses it. Let him determine how it will be used.** You just bring it. God can do big things with the little you bring. You just don't ever know for sure.

That's what I love as we talk as a church. The last couple of weeks, I haven't been posting a lot online other than family pictures and fish and that type of stuff. Amy was like, "Hey, are you okay? You just seem really chill." I'm like, "Yeah, because I'm not online. I'm not dealing with..." And I definitely have been off Twitter because it's just... Twitter has become a toxic cesspool, especially for ministry. It's terrible. Pastors are all bums and churches are chaotic, crazy messes. All I know is this. God is still using the church. No matter how many people keep coming against it, no matter how many people want to try to bring it down, no matter how many pastors try to tear down other pastors... We have a major denomination in the country that many of us are familiar with and many were raised in that's looking at a split and they are just at each other's throats.

None of that is going to bring down the church. If we stay focused, as a church, on health, if we stay focused on doing the right thing, going into the neighborhood, reaching people... Do you have any idea what could happen in this church and in this community if every single person in here, with the little that we have to offer, would bring it. Could you imagine what could happen. I'm talking big things. We talk about homelessness in this community all the time and don't hear any solutions. I don't know if you know that. We've got little things going on here and there and people are like "We'll let that person do it." But instead of coming alongside that person, you do something as well. I think we have everything we need in this church and in this community to solve these problems... IF we bring what we have.

I think one of the issues that struck me online recently... I know if you grew up Baptist, soul-winning was a big conversation. My responsibility is to witness and share my faith, not to win souls; that's God's responsibility. God saves people, not me. We get caught up in results so much that when we don't see them, we stop doing our part. But when you read the first church on this Pentecost Sunday... I love Acts 2: 47. After the church is being the church, the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved. We are responsible to share, we're responsible to do our part, we're responsible to witness, we're responsible to testify, we're responsible to give and serve and love and care for one another. Let the Lord determine the size of this church. Let the Lord determine the impact from this church in this community. Our job is simple. Bring what you have. Stop making excuses. Be responsible for what you have and bring it. Bring your lunch to Jesus. That's what this message should have been called. Bring your lunch to Jesus and let's see what he can do with it.

Father, it's in the name of Jesus that we thank you for this series. I thank you for the teaching team that has put so much into this. I thank you for their hearts and their study and their desire to live this out, and for a congregation who takes seriously the words of Jesus, the ministry of Jesus, the life of Jesus. We want this to be our lives. When we feel we don't have a lot to give, a lot to offer, may we bring it anyway. Not waiting, not hoping, not thinking that someone else will fill this void for us, but I bring what I have. And then we get excited to watch what you are going to do with it.

For the one who has never placed faith in Jesus, that today would be the day of their salvation. That they would confess their sins, that they would confess with their mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe that he has been raised from the dead that they will be saved.

We pray all of this in the name of Jesus, and everyone agreed and said... Amen!