

When I was young and starting out my father taught me a little trick about money. He said to figure up how long I had to work to buy something and then decide if it was worth it. So that meant for a meal, I'd figure up my hourly wage, subtract taxes, and soon find, back then I have to work 3-4 hours for that meal. Pretty soon I expect that figure to rise to a couple of weeks, at least.

When Jesus inquires about buying bread for the people, he's causing something similar to happen. The disciples say it would cost more than 200 hundred denarii. Now to us, that sounds like a nice big number, but what does it mean? Well, a denarii was, at the time, a decent daily wage for a common laborer. This was not minimum wage, but a good pay. Like maybe a little bit better than median. And what could this buy you? Well, David Hendin's Guide to Biblical coins helps us figure that out. In the 1st and 2nd century, one amphora of olive oil was a denarii, and that same denarii could buy about 12 loaves of bread. A lamb would be about 4 denarii, a ram 8, and an ox, a good working beast, about 100. Clothing made of sacking might cost you about 4 denarii and last 4 years. In 159 AD, a half of a house was purchased for 300 denarii. You could get about 16 glasses of wine for a denarii or ten bunches of grapes. A scribe would make about 12 denarii a week.

All this to say that 200 denarii was a huge amount. It was at least the cost of two ox, needed for things like plowing. It'd go a long way towards a home. For a well paid common laborer, to borrow my dad's tactic, that was 200 days of labor. That's no small amount. To feed these people is a herculean task.

From the crowd lunch comparable to the widows mites is offered. Two little fish and a few loaves of barley bread from a boy who was apparently the only one smart enough to bring a snack. He gives up his lunch, knowing that there isn't enough to feed everyone, a cynic might say he's giving up any chance at a full belly. But God.

Jesus blesses this small bounty, and all of a sudden, there is more than enough to go around. In fact, I'd say there was the perfect amount. Everyone ate their fill with a little extra for comfort, a bit of a buffer. The people are amazed, and their needs met, and Jesus is glorified.

And this still happens today.

There's a story about a man, Chaplain McCabe, had set out to raise a million dollars for missions. He was faced with many disappointments and was often greatly discouraged. One day while going through a mail that was particularly discouraging, he finally came across a letter from a boy, from which fell a badly-battered five-cent piece. The letter, in a boyish scrawl, and liberally punctuated with blots, read:

Dear Chaplain McCabe:

I'm sure you're going to get a million dollars for missions. And I'm going to help you get it too. So here's a nickel toward it. It's all I've got right now, but if you need any more, you just call on me.

This became one of the Chaplain's most effective stories in his money-raising campaign, and by it he was eventually able to reach his goal. A boy's nickel, multiplied, became a million dollars. He helped far more than he knew.

We talk about budgets and expenses with big numbers and too many zeros behind them. Often times we are discouraged, realizing that even if we wanted to, we can't give enough to meet a need of the church or community. So we give what we can. But what we so often forget is that we are giving our little fish and barley loaves to one who is able to feed the masses with them. God is willing and able to take what we can give and multiple it. Never think your offerings of time and resources are ineffective. I promise you, God can use even the widows mite to fill amazing needs. God is able to meet our needs, even when we think we don't have enough.

But the giving is still important, not because God needs it, but because we do. Later in our scripture reading Jesus walks on water. Such is his control over the elements. If he had wanted to, he could have commanded the sea to spit up its fish. He could have called fruit trees to grow in their midst. He could've turned the grass into the finest foods. He could've just made the food appear. Instead, he takes the offering of this small boy.

I've wondered if there was more food, if truly all that could be found was the loaves and fish or if people didn't want to share. If people felt like it wouldn't make a difference, worried over how their contribution would be used, disagreed with something the disciples said, or what not. Whatever the reason, Jesus chooses not to manifest food out of nowhere, which is certainly in his ability, but to take this little offering, freely given with the selflessness of a child, and multiple it to feed thousands of people. Jesus didn't need those barley loaves or fish, but the people needed to learn to

give, to trust God with what they had and what they needed. John Wesley once: When I have any money, I get rid of it as quickly as possible, lest it find a way into my heart. We give not because God needs it, but because it is good and right, it puts our lives into perspective. It changes us. It reminds us that this life is just a breath, a mist, a fog, quickly fleeting, and that the most important things in it are not money, but God and each other. When we hold on too tightly to the riches of this world, whether they be money or some other material thing, we risk taking our eyes off the horizon of eternity and focusing on things that will have no meaning when we join the saints in heaven. We give not because God needs it, but because we do, and because God has already given us all. In gratitude we give back to God what was God's to begin with.

I'll leave you with a story that shows what gratitude can do. There was a story brought by German immigrants about a woman who lived in Germany on a farm and one day she brings her pastor \$10. She says in previous years I've spent this much on medicine, and this year I didn't have to, so I'm giving it to God in gratitude. A little while later she brings \$5 because there was a storm and it caused damage to her neighbor's property, and she was spared, so she brought the cost of repair in gratitude to God. She fought the instinct to hoard, to save that money for a rainy day, and instead gave it up like the little boy with the fish and loaves. She gave back to God, knowing that God would multiply her gifts and more importantly, would provide for her future needs.

Friends, God doesn't need money. Everything is already God's. But we need God, and we need to give, to be reminded of God's goodness and power, and of the needs of brothers and sisters. And may God bless all we are able to return to God, and may we rest in the assurance God will always provide for our needs.