**What If We Do Something Extraordinary?**

**Matthew 14:13-21**

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November 24, 2024

Extraordinary. Extra-ordinary. Merriam Webster gives two different definitions for extraordinary. 1) Going beyond what is usual, regular, or customary, exceptional to a marked extent and 2) employed for or sent on a special function or service.  What if we, as a church, do something extraordinary?

We are nearing the close of our stewardship sermon series, “I Dream of A Church”.  Each week we have talked about some question that starts with “What if?” because those are the words that lead to dreaming. The first question was “What if we trust God first?”.  In other words, what if we strengthen our relationship with God and, as we make decisions  for ourselves and our church, we trust God to lead us? Last week, the question was “What if our budget aligned with our values?”  What could we do to make a difference in our community or world if our spending was based on what we value?  Now, today, we’re going to focus on that question I asked a moment ago - what if we, as a church, do something extraordinary?

What might it be?  How would we do it? Today, we’re going to dream big dreams for our church! We’re going to think outside the box.  We’re going to open our minds to what we might do that is beyond the ordinary. And if, as I’m preaching, you come up with an idea or dream that you’re really excited about, I hope you will write it on the cloud you received as you came to worship this morning and drop it in the offering basket as you leave.

Now, when it comes to doing the extraordinary, there is no better example than Jesus.  Whatever you might think about the validity of miracles, he did some exceptional things. Take, for example, our scripture reading for today.

For many of us, this story of the loaves and fishes is very familiar, but there are a few things in it that I would like to highlight. First, let’s talk about where it starts.  Jesus is weary. He has been traveling, teaching, and healing.  So, he is already tired when he learns about the senseless killing of his cousin and friend, John the Baptist.  Now, he is grieving, as well. He needs some time alone, a chance to catch his breath and rest.

So, he sets off in a boat to be on his own for a while, away from the crowds.  And what happens?  They follow him, of course. When he lands, they are there waiting for him and, though he is weary and not really ready, he has compassion on them and heals their sick because they have real, concrete needs that he knows he can help with.

Of course, after a while, one of their needs is food.  The disciples want to send them to the neighboring villages to buy food, but Jesus says, “They don’t need to go away. You feed them.”  “You feed them” - because that is what I am teaching you, what you are called to do.  Don’t send the people away. You feed them.

Of course, they object because they only have five loaves of bread and two fish. How can they feed 5000 people? And that’s when he does something extraordinary. Jesus first looks to heaven, presumably asking for God to work through him.  He gives thanks for what God has given them.  And he breaks the bread. The disciples take the broken bread, turn around to feed the crowds, and suddenly there is more than enough food. Everyone eats their fill, and they even have leftovers. I know many of us are tired.  There has been so much chaos in recent years.  But, Jesus’ call hasn’t changed - you feed them.

One of the characteristics of a church nearing the end of its life cycle is that it becomes increasingly insular. More and more of the programs, the budget, the staff time are focused on the congregation itself.  We’re not there yet, but we’re in danger of getting there.  Interestingly, what revitalizes churches is when they reach out to their community, listen to what the community needs, and find ways that the church can address those needs.  In the process, they build relationships with other churches, community agencies, schools, artists, athletes, and those relationships broaden the impact of what they do.  You feed them, Jesus says.  You go to them. You hear what they need. You offer them what you have to give. And God will take care of the rest.

This is what I mean when I say in my vision for the church that I dream of a church that becomes increasingly missional.  And that may mean feeding the hungry and caring for the unhoused.  Or it may mean something entirely different.  Let me show you an example from another Methodist church in our conference.

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That’s not the only example. There are plenty of others from United Methodist Churches across the country.  Many churches are focusing on creating “third spaces” -  communal spaces that are different from home or work where people can gather, socialize, and get to know each other.  A church in Indiana put up a rock-climbing wall which serves as a gathering place for youth and young adults and is also used for PE classes by the school nearby.  A church in Oklahoma City has now opened two locations of a comic store and gaming space where self-proclaimed nerds can hang out. Young people and adults alike can pick up their favorite comics and stay to play a game of Dungeons and Dragons. Members of the church volunteer there and the church Minister of Community Engagement offers pastoral care and opportunities for spiritual growth.

Another church has intentionally renovated part of their building to create a worship space that is appropriate for the needs of autistic children, which has led to a whole ministry with autistic kids and their families. They became aware of the increasing number of children diagnosed with autism and felt that was a part of their community they could help.

Haven United Methodist Church in Rhode Island has started the Community Music Project offering free music lessons to children in the community that can’t afford private lessons.  Cresaptown UMC in Maryland has created gardens on their property to provide fresh produce to people who can’t pay for it easily.

So, what are we going to do, FUMC?  How are we going to feed God’s people? What needs do we know of?  What dreams do you have?  For your last little gift, this week I have gotten each of you a small compass to represent the journey we are on together. Turn to your compass when you pray for our church. Let it remind you to listen for what God has for us to do. We have so much potential to feed God’s people - and there is plenty of hunger of all kinds out there.  Not only will we be responding to God’s call to serve, but I believe it will bring new vitality and hope to us, as well. So, let’s keep dreaming FUMC!  Let’s do something extraordinary!

May it be so.