

## **Count on Me to Give**

**March 5, 2017**

*Pastor Jeff Wood*

*Announcements:* Today we give you a chance to turn in Estimate of Giving cards if you have not already done so. They can be picked up and mailed in at any time. This all sounds sort of fund-raising like and it's not that it isn't, but truly for Christians it is beyond the clerical. It is spiritual. We celebrate our blessings, our being able to give thanks, our being able to give, our saying that we trust God to provide. It's also a way of working with an antidote to human greed.

*Call to Confession:* I can't tell you how wonderful it is to hear someone say to me this phrase, "Jeff, you can count on me." I don't know why a phrase can be so meaningful. I don't know. I do know that it is a great thing to hear.

You know what else? It also feels good to say it to someone else. For example, when I say to my children, "You can count on me," that feels really good.

Sometimes I think of standing before God and saying, "God, you can count on me." In these moments, as the words form in my mind to say them, if I am completely honest, I feel some tinge of worry ... that I cannot live up to those words. You can imagine that, I reckon.

When I start to feel that not hero but goat stuff, that failure stuff, I often hear the words of Martin Luther's great hymn, "A Mighty Fortress is Our God." Remember those words, "If we, in our own strength confide, our striving would be losing"? And, as if reading my thoughts, I hear God say to me, "Jeff, what is important is that you *want* me to count on you, and here's one thing more: *You* can always count on *me*. My

friends, do you know this? Take it, and with it, let us approach God in prayer.

*Message:* We're going to talk about something counterintuitive, and yet at the same time it is embedded in wisdom given by God and attested by many generations as how to have a good life and one that knows God. We actually began this two weeks ago when we considered count on me to serve. We have a human bent and lean toward wanting to be served, but the counterintuitive wisdom-move is to serve. This is almost sacramental for us ... being anointed in baptism to serve. Whenever we say sacramental, we are talking about a delivery system of God's activity and grace to our lives. And we're talking about what exhibits the essence of the Christian life. Service brings the grace of God into our lives and it is the essence of Jesus, therefore of the Christian life.

Today we're going to go in a similar direction.

*In the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, these words:* John 6:1-13 Some time after this, Jesus crossed to the far shore of the Sea of Galilee (that is, the Sea of Tiberias), [2] and a great crowd of people followed him because they saw the miraculous signs he had performed on the sick. [3] Then Jesus went up on a mountainside and sat down with his disciples. [4] The Jewish Passover Feast 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?" [6] He asked this only to test him, for he already had in mind what he was going to do. [7] Philip answered him, "Eight months' wages would not buy enough bread for each one to have a bite!" [8] Another

of his disciples, Andrew, Simon Peter's brother, spoke up, [9] "Here is a boy with five small barley loaves and two small fish, but how far will they go among so many?" [10] Jesus said, "Have the people sit down." There was plenty of grass in that place, and the men sat down, about five thousand of them. [11] Jesus then took the loaves, gave thanks, and distributed to those who were seated as much as they wanted. 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 Word became flesh and dwelt among us full of grace and truth; and from his fullness have we all received, grace upon grace.*

There is a crowd following Jesus. The crowd is so large that the disciple, Philip, says that eight month's wages wouldn't *begin* to feed them. There are 5,000 men, and if we add in the women and children, maybe the numbers are what -- 10,000?

It may be large due to his healing ministry. There's a comment about that as the story begins. People will come out to get healed, to get someone healed, to see a healing. A few years ago some revivalist thing was happening up in Lakeland. I didn't and don't know much about it, not enough to commend or condemn it. But I know people from Melbourne drove up there every single day. People hungry for healing will come out.

It may be a large crowd also because it is Passover time. We are told that in the story as well. So it's a time of pilgrimage and many more people than usual are out

and about. Being Passover, and that has to do with Moses throwing off the Egyptian yoke, the people might be hoping for a Messiah to liberate them from the Roman yoke. Maybe thinking of Moses made this crowd ready to follow a Moses-like guy out into the wilderness. People hungry for freedom will come out, will travel a long way. We know that from take-back-the-country type of political rallies we have seen in our day and age and country and other countries.

Whether hungry for healing or for freedom, they have traveled far enough that they are just plain hungry, physically hungry. Jesus knowing their hunger, asks Philip. "How shall we feed them?" Now it's interesting that the text actually says that Jesus *tests* Philip. That he tests him means Jesus has something in mind for Philip. He wants to develop Philip.

In high school I was on the track team. I hadn't been on one before but I came to a new school for me and gave it a try. It so happened that my first day was also the day of the first meet. While I was at my locker, someone was looking at the board saying who was running what. I heard him say, "Who is Jeff Wood. He's running everything!" I looked and I was. That coach said he wanted to test me, to see things about me. He wanted to develop me and needed some info. Jesus wants to test Philip, to grow him. (Did you know that Jesus has that desire for every one of us here today?)

What is it exactly that Jesus wants to see if it will happen in Philip or what is it exactly that Jesus wants to grow in Philip? Is it that he wants to see if Philip will fly off the handle at something so outlandish? Is it whether Philip will be industrious and offer to go way back into town and rouse all the catering businesses there? Is it whether Philip will argue for forcefully dismissing the

people? No, I think what Jesus wants to see is whether Philip has any concept of what it means *to give to Jesus*, any concept of *the potentiality of putting things in Jesus' hands*.

Potentiality. Potentiality. The potentiality of putting possessions into the not-yet-but-soon-will-be nail scarred palms of Jesus and then seeing grace flow.

I think it has to do with that because giving is all through this story. It's like the riddle about what's black and white and red all over and it's a sunburned zebra. There is giving all over the black and white of this text. Andrew *gives* a small boy to Jesus. A small boy *gives* his small lunch to Jesus. Jesus *gives* this small lunch to his Father and then his father through Jesus *gives* it to the crowd. But it all starts out with giving *to Jesus*. That's why this is what Jesus is testing for.

And there are three wonderful, wonderful lessons Jesus has for us here about giving.

Here's the first -- there is no person or gift that is too small. It's a little boy who gives. A little lunch box. A little fish, two sardines. Small rolls. He's not a man. He doesn't have a grocery store. There's no big salmon hoisted on his shoulder. He doesn't have long French bread loaves. Little.

Sometimes we get to thinking, "I'm too little in terms of energy, in terms of faith, in terms of income, in terms of strength, in terms of so many things.

Sometimes we say, "What difference would my five dollars make?"

Don't say what difference or I'm too little. Well, what difference did this boy's lunch make? And here's the thing -- Look, Jesus can use any person and any gift no matter what the size. You see, it is never about the size of the giver or the size of the gift. It is always about

the size of Jesus. It is never about the size of the donor or the donation. It is always about the size of Jesus. It is never about the how big we are or how big our gift is. It is always about the size of *Jesus*.

Here's a second lesson on giving to Jesus -- what is given to Jesus expands. It's minnows, sardines, small dinner rolls. Do the math – 5 and 2 and for one boy and it takes care of five thousand plus. And there are leftovers. A happy meal gets super, super-sized. What's given to Jesus expands.

I got a retirement fund report in the mail this week and it said that the original investment was expanding. I like that. I like it when someone brings a friend along to a dinner party and we set a place for one more. We like it when things expand. What we give to God somewhere, somehow, perhaps only known to him exactly, always expands.

A friend named Dave gave some stock to a church I worked at. He heard I had something I wanted to do so he told me to use it for that. But what I wanted to do was going to cost \$7,000. The stock he gave was worth \$2,500. It wasn't enough. I gave it to the church treasurer who processed it with Merrill Lynch. For some reason it took more than a little time to get it processed. But when it finally did two months later, guess what? It was worth \$7,000! That's the way it works with Jesus.

What we give to Jesus grows. It may grow slow like a seed in the ground or it may grow out of sight, or it may grow simply in some mysterious way in heaven. The only thing I can think of that shrinks when we give it to Jesus is our sin, our guilt. Thank God for that. But everything else grows.

Here's a third lesson -- what is given to Jesus helps people. What you give to Jesus goes to people.

Jesus cares for people. In another place this feeding story is told, the writer says Jesus saw the crowds and had compassion on them. What we give to Jesus is connected to his compassion for people. What we give, no matter how little we are or how small our gift, Jesus expands it *for people*.

In education there is being teacher-centered. The center weight is on how the teacher is doing. Or you can be curriculum-centered with the weight on “We got to stay with the lesson plan period.” Or you can be student-centered where the point is are they getting it? Are they understanding? Jesus is people centered and what gets given to him gets centered on people as well. If you open up God and see his heart, you see people.

Mother Theresa. What do you think of when you hear her name? A person who cared about people. Where did she learn that? From her master, Jesus Christ. A little person, who became big in influence, caring about people. It’s the story of giving to Jesus.

Friends, the three points of this loaves and fishes story is a deal. No one too small, it all expands, it goes to people. Don’t you just want to say, “Count on me, O God, to give?”

Philip had the Passover stories all around him that day. He knew of Moses leading his forefathers from Egypt into the desert. He knew of God providing, cloud by day, fire by night, and manna, or bread, every morning. But, but, but ... it was just a long time ago. I wonder if he ever conceived that it could really happen again, with him? that day?

And the distance between Philip and Moses and manna, that has got to be about the distance between Philip and the feeding of the 5000 and *us*. It’s an

important story. But, but, but ... it was a long time ago. I wonder if you could ever believe that it could happen again, with you? Today?

Could God even today, with you take something from your hand and do something amazing? Maybe Jesus isn't just testing Philip but you and I as well. Do you think you could stand on this story and with wonder in your heart say, "Jesus, count on me to give to you"?

### *Offering*

Someone once said, "A basketball in my hand is worth \$29.95, but a basketball in Michael Jordan's hand was worth about \$13 million. A golf club in my hands means look out! But a club in Arnold Palmer's hand meant, 'champion.'" A scalpel in my hand is dangerous. But a scalpel in a surgeon's hands means healing. "A rod in my hand makes a good walking stick, but a rod in Moses' hand will part the Red Sea." And a lunch in Philip's hand would have been just a lunch. Two nails in my hand will get you a birdhouse. But nails in Jesus hand, the salvation of the world. If your sin and guilt, those nails, becomes the salvation of the world, what will happen if you put your money and your faith into his hands?

O People, won't you say to this one with these amazing hands, "Count on me, Jesus, to give"?

*If you would like to talk with someone about this message or your spiritual life, or to have someone pray with you, the pastors and elders of the church would welcome your call. [pastorjeffwood@gmail.com](mailto:pastorjeffwood@gmail.com) [www.welovefirst.org](http://www.welovefirst.org)  
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