

Menifee United Church of Christ

Established in 1962 by God, Jesus and the Holy Spirit

SERMON FOR

July 26, 2015

“Share and Cher Alike”



Reverend Bill Freeman: Senior Minister
Eckart Seeber: Music Minister
Marie Paulus-Nyquist: Children's Minister
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Menifee United Church of Christ

Sunday Service and Sunday School 10 AM

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Live Life Fully Alive!

2 Kings 4:42-44

A man came from Baal-shalishah, bringing food from the first fruits to the man of God: twenty loaves of barley and fresh ears of grain in his sack. Elisha said, 'Give it to the people and let them eat.' But his servant said, 'How can I set this before a hundred people?' So he repeated, 'Give it to the people and let them eat, for thus says the LORD, "They shall eat and have some left."' He set it before them, they ate, and had some left, according to the word of the LORD.

John 6:4-14

Now the Passover, the festival of the Jews, was near. When he looked up and saw a large crowd coming towards him, Jesus said to Philip, 'Where are we to buy bread for these people to eat?' He said this to test him, for he himself knew what he was going to do. Philip answered him, 'Six months' wages would not buy enough bread for each of them to get a little.' One of his disciples, Andrew, Simon Peter's brother, said to him, 'There is a boy here who has five barley loaves and two fish. But what are they among so many people?' 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. 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. When they were satisfied, he told his disciples, 'Gather up the fragments left over, so that nothing may be lost.' So they gathered them up, and from the fragments of the five barley loaves, left by those who had eaten, they filled twelve baskets. 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.'

“Share And Cher Alike”

I had a friend in Junior High. It was called Junior High back then, not Middle School. One Saturday we went to the movies. Afterward we walked to a nearby burger joint. We each got a little hamburger. I quickly wolfed mine down. Then my friend's family drove up to take us home. I noticed that my friend had most of his hamburger left. Now he had several brothers and sisters, like six or seven. And I think the whole family was in the

car to pick us up. As soon as we got in the car, my friend said that we just got a hamburger and would anybody want a bite of his? And they all did. So he passed this little burger around and everybody took a little bite. I was astonished at my friend's generosity; by his capacity to share. And maybe that's what you learn in a large family, you learn to share.

When we think of sharing, maybe we think of something tangible, like food. But some people share intangibles with others. Teachers share ideas with others. Singers share songs with others. Ministers share prayers with others.

Why do some people share with others? Why do some people hoard from others? Why are some people generous? Why are some people stingy? Why are some people selfless? Why are some people selfish? I don't know. Maybe some people were born to share or hoard. Maybe some people were raised to be generous or stingy. Maybe some people learned to be selfless or selfish along the road of life.

What do you share with others? Maybe you share something tangible with others, like food. Maybe you share something intangible with others. Maybe you share love with your grandkids. Maybe you share memories with your kids. Maybe you share knowledge with a mentor. Maybe you share your time, talent, and treasure with this church. Christianity is all about sharing.

Jesus showed us how to share. Jesus looked up and saw a large crowd - about 5,000 people - coming toward him. Jesus said to Philip: Where are we going to buy bread to feed all these people? Philip said to Jesus: We could take six months' wages to buy bread and it wouldn't be enough to feed all these people. Andrew said to Jesus: Hey, Jesus, here's a kid with five loaves of bread and two fish, but that's not enough to feed all these people. Jesus said to Andrew: Wanna bet? Have all these people sit down. Then they sat down. Then Jesus thanked God for the bread and the fish and he shared the food with them. After the people ate all that they wanted, Jesus told his disciples to gather up all the leftovers. So they gathered up twelve baskets of food. When the people saw what Jesus had done they said, "This man

is a prophet.”

Preachers have two ways of looking at the miracle of this story. Most preachers conclude that Jesus miraculously multiplied the loaves and the fishes, and that’s how he was able to feed the 5,000. My guess is that’s how many people have heard this story preached. Some preachers, though, conclude that Jesus performed a different kind of miracle. Jesus miraculously got the 5,000 to share with others the food that they themselves had. Think about it. This may have been the first church potluck. These people may have traveled many miles over many days to see and hear Jesus. Many likely had bread and fish in their backpacks. So when they saw that Jesus was going to try to feed all these people with five loaves and two fish, they threw their own extra bread and fish in the baskets. Others, if they didn’t have anything to give, took some of the bread and the fish. But most people shared with others what they had. Then there were twelve baskets of food leftover. The beauty of being at a United Church of Christ church: You can believe whichever miracle you want to believe and nobody’s going to judge you for what you believe. Was this a miracle of Jesus multiplying the loaves and the fishes? Or was this a miracle of Jesus getting people to share what they had with others? Either way, it’s a miracle.

Churches perform a similar miracle every Sunday. We pass around offering plates. Now, some people have put their offering in the offering plates already, before the service has started. Then those few...loaves and fishes, if you will, miraculously multiply as they get passed around this church, and people share what they have with this church. And by the end of our offering our ushers collect everything. And we give thanks for what you all shared. It’s a miracle.

It’s like the first time I went to Survival Ministries. They giveaway food to those in need in one building; and they have a store, with clothing and other items, that people can buy cheap, in another building. At the store, I noticed that the checkout didn’t have one of those dishes that you see in gas stations and convenience stores, with a sign that says: Need a penny, take a penny. So I got a dish and I put it at the checkout, and I took \$20 from the Minister’s Discretionary Fund, and I told the woman

that runs the store: You should put up a sign that says: Need a twenty, take a twenty. She thanked me (really, she thanked you). And the next time I went there, the woman told me that right after I left, a family came needing lots of stuff, but they didn't have much money, so she gave them that \$20. (Of course, when I heard that, I left another 20.)

In the Hebrew Scriptures, we see a similar story to Jesus' loaves and fishes miracle. A man brings food - twenty loaves of barley and fresh ears of grain in his sack - to Elisha. Elisha tells his servant to share it with the hundred people there. But his servant asked: How can this feed a hundred people? So Elisha repeated: Share it with the people to eat, for the Lord says, "They shall eat and have some left." Sure enough, they ate and had some left. It was a miracle.

Jesus wants us to share with those in need. He said, "I was hungry and you gave me food...I was naked and you gave me clothing...I was a stranger and you welcomed me...Truly I tell you, just as you did it to one of the least of these who are members of my family, you did it to me." So, Jesus wants us to feed the hungry, clothe the naked, and welcome the stranger. And this church does that.

This church shares a lot. In case you didn't know: We have Saturday Breakfast and a Food Pantry to feed the hungry. We have a Clothing Closet to clothe the naked. And we welcome the stranger who is homeless, by giving him or her a place to sleep, either on our grounds, or in rooms in our Fellowship Hall. Presently we have several homeless people that we share our church with. I know many people in this church and many people in this community appreciate that. But a few do not.

In case you haven't heard, as I understand it, my picture was up on a bulletin board in the neighborhood. There was a caption that said something like: This is Rev. Bill Freeman, the evil man who's housing the homeless in our area. Unfortunately, it was taken down before I got a chance to see it. Too bad. I wanted to autograph my picture for them. In all seriousness, don't worry that some people oppose what we're sharing with others. Remember, some people opposed what Jesus was sharing with

others, too.

Dom Helder Camara, the Catholic Archbishop of Brazil, knew something about sharing. And he knew something about facing opposition. Dom Helder Camara declared once, “When I feed the poor, they call me a saint, but when I ask why the poor are hungry, they call me a Communist.” (I wonder if people in our neighborhood call me a Communist.)

Why is sharing sometimes controversial? And political? Government is often organized to systematize sharing. We the people, in the form of our government, pool our resources, in the form of our taxes, to help people in need. Sure, it would be nice if churches and charities could take care of the poor, but churches and charities don't have enough money to do that. Heck, the government doesn't even have enough money to do that. If churches and charities and the government could take care of all the poor people in LA county, there wouldn't be 45,000 homeless people there. Some people say the poor should pick themselves up by their bootstraps. But how do poor people do that if they don't even have boots?

Some people don't want the government to share with others...until they're one of the others. If they're the victim of a flood and they're sitting on the roof of their house, surrounded by water, they want that government helicopter dropping down a rope ladder to rescue them. All of a sudden their taxes are finally being put to good use, to help them in their hour of need; and not being “wasted,” you know, “to coddle the poor.”

Maybe that's why Jesus said, “Blessed are you who are poor...But woe to you who are rich.” Because he knew some rich people don't want to share with others. Many do. But some are like the rich man, who wouldn't give any help to Lazarus, but wanted Lazarus to help him when Lazarus was in heaven and the rich man was in hell. Maybe that's why Jesus said, “The poor you will always have with you.” Because he knew we would always have needy people, because he also knew we would always have greedy people, who don't want to share.

Cher and Sonny Bono had a hit song decades ago that has to do

with sharing. At least sharing with each other. The song is entitled, "I Got You Babe." Sonny and Cher sing, "I got you to hold my hand. I got you to understand. I got you to walk with me. I got you to talk with me." It's good to have somebody to share with: A loved one, a friend, a fellow parishioner. That's why many people come to church, to share with others. And that's what this church is here to do. To hold people's hands. To understand. To walk with people. And to talk with people. To share with others.

The story goes that there are people in hell who can't bend their elbows. They're sitting across a long table from other people in hell who can't bend their elbows. They're given soup to eat and spoons to eat the soup with. But they can't bend their elbows to feed themselves. So they experience misery in hell. The story also goes that there are people in heaven who can't bend their elbows. They're sitting across a long table from other people in heaven who can't bend their elbows. They're given soup to eat and spoons to eat with. But they can't bend their elbows to feed themselves. So they reach across the table and feed each other. And they experience joy in heaven. That's one difference between heaven and hell. People in heaven have learned to share.

So when people share good things with others, they're in heaven. When teachers share ideas with others, they're in heaven. When singers share songs with others, they're in heaven. And when churches follow the teachings of Jesus and share food, clothing, and shelter with others, they're in heaven. May you always share good things with others, so you can always be in heaven.

Let us pray...

*God of Love,
Help us to share with others.
Help us to share with those we love.
And help us to share
with those we don't even know.
Now and forevermore.
By the power of the Holy Spirit.
And in the name of Jesus.
Amen.*

THE GOLDEN RULE

*What is hateful to you
do not do to others.*

Judaism

*Do to others what you would
have them do to you.*

Christianity

*None of you believes until he wishes for his
brother what he wishes for himself.*

Islam

*Do not do to others
what would cause pain if done to you.*

Hinduism

*Hurt not others in ways that you yourself
would find hurtful.*

Buddism

*Regard your neighbor's gain as your gain,
and your neighbor's loss as your loss.*

Taoism

*Do not do to others
what you do not want them to do to you.*

Confucianism

*Treat other people
as you'd want to be treated in their situation.*

Humanism