The Power of Giving

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*After this Jesus went to the other side of the Sea of Galilee, also called the Sea of Tiberias. **2** A large crowd kept following him, because they saw the signs that he was doing for the sick. **3** Jesus went up the mountain and sat down there with his disciples. **4** Now the Passover, the festival of the Jews, was near. **5** When he looked up and saw a large crowd coming toward him, Jesus said to Philip, "Where are we to buy bread for these people to eat?" **6** He said this to test him, for he himself knew what he was going to do. **7** Philip answered him, "Six months' wages would not buy enough bread for each of them to get a little." **8** One of his disciples, Andrew, Simon Peter's brother, said to him, **9** "There is a boy here who has five barley loaves and two fish. But what are they among so many people?" **10** 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. **11** 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. **12** When they were satisfied, he told his disciples, "Gather up the fragments left over, so that nothing may be lost." **13** So they gathered them up, and from the fragments of the five barley loaves, left by those who had eaten, they filled twelve baskets. **14** 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." **15** When Jesus realized that they were about to come and take him by force to make him king, he withdrew again to the mountain by himself*. (John 6:1-15)

1. Important Life Events

We all celebrate important events in our lives. Graduations, a new job, marriage, or a new child are events that we love to remember. As Christians, we also celebrate significant moments in our faith journey. We celebrate our baptism, confirmation, and becoming part of a faith community.

Today, we are celebrating the confirmation of Ainslee Frost, Ella and David Furtado. Cathy Sharon-Matthews started the confirmation class with these three last September. They studied the OT and New Testament. Later, Sharon Kantzer led the class and Susan Scott taught about the Methodist Church. Since they were baptized when they were younger, we remember this day as their confirmation. According to UMC.org, "confirmation is a sacred day of commitment and celebration in the life of an individual and the church." Before we confirm Ainslee, Ella and David, I'd like to share a meditation on the meaning of confirmation based on Exodus chapter 19 and John chapter 6. At the same time, I would exhort each of us to renew our baptism and confirmation of faith in Christ.

2. Israel at Mt. Sinai and Confirmation

Two months after the Exodus from Egypt, the Israelites entered the Desert of Sinai and camped by the mountain, Mount Sinai. Although we don't know the exact location of Mt. Sinai, we often identify Mt. Sinai with Mt. Horeb, where God appeared to Moses in the burning bush. Here, God compares His delivering the

Israelites from slavery to carrying them on eagles' wings. God reminds the people of how a mother eagle flies with her wings spread out to catch young eagles when they learn to fly.

At Sinai, God gives the Israelites a covenant promising them an exalted position among the nations. If the people obey the covenant, God would make them his treasured possession. The Israelites would be His own people, highly valued by the Lord. The covenant between God and Israel at Mount Sinai is the extension of the covenant between the Lord and Abraham. The purpose of the covenant is to bless the Israelites. Genesis 12:2 says, "***I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you, and make your name great***."

As God promised to Abraham, God up to this point had been caring for the Israelites. God gives Abraham a son, Isaac, when Abraham is 100 years old. God makes Jacob and his family move to Egypt when there is a famine in Israel. God rescues Israel from slavery in Egypt through Moses.

What does the history of Israel tell us? The history tells us that God pays attention to His people. Does God do the same for us? The answer is "yes." When we answer yes to this question, we can say the definition of confirmation. My personal definition of confirmation is that confirmation is acknowledging what God has been doing for us and giving thanks to Him for his love, grace and blessings. Confirmands, what are you grateful for to God, to your parents, and to the church?

As the pastor, one of the most important areas of my focus is on children and youth ministry. In many ways, children and youth ministry are more important than any other ministry. We can get more help for other areas, but raising a child and youth to grow in faith is not easy. Without children and youth there is no future of the church.

Our Monday night prayer group began to pray for our children and youth two years ago. We asked God to send us 15 children. David and Lisa Malcolmson started our youth ministry once a month two years ago. On our Sunday School students' list, we have 22 youth and children. God has blessed us. We give thanks to the Lord.

Last year, I was so happy when Cathy Sharon-Matthews began to organize and teach a confirmation class in September. The confirmation class is certainly God's blessing for our church. Today, we acknowledge God's blessings and give thanks to God for His blessings upon these three confirmands and us. I pray that today is a very important day for Ainslee, Ella, and David. They make a covenant.

3. Making a Covenant with the Lord

In Exodus 19:5 & 6, God says to Moses, "***If you obey my voice and keep my covenant, you shall be my treasured possession out of all the peoples. … You shall be for me a priestly kingdom, and a holy nation***." God wants the people of Israel to make a covenant with the Lord at the Sinai Desert.

When Moses says to the leaders of the Israelites, they say, "***Everything that the Lord has spoken we will do***" (verse 8). Israel accepts God's proposal, an agreement where the people of Israel recognize God as their Lord. The people enter into a contract based on their promise to follow God and to obey the Lord.

Confirmation is not only 1) acknowledging God's blessings and to give thanks to God, but also 2) promising to follow God's commandments and His directions. God's covenant with Israel at Mt. Sinai is like a wedding. The Ten Commandments are like wedding rings. Isaiah 62:5 says, "***as a bridegroom rejoices over his bride, so will your God rejoice over you***." And Isaiah 54:5 & 6 say, "***For your Maker is your husband … The Lord will call you back as if you were a wife deserted and distressed in spirit – a wife who married young, only to be rejected," says your God***."

The prophet Isaiah says that God is Israel's husband. God would be far from his wife Israel for a brief moment, but God would call Israel back. It's probably hard for our three confirmands to think about what a wedding might be like for them. But the Bible tells us God would love us as the bridegroom loves his bride. The marriage relationship with God is a metaphor that is used to illustrate our intimate relationship with the Lord. The question that we ask ourselves in our faith journey is "do we want that kind of relationship with God?" Some may not want that kind of intimate relationship with God, but God would want to have with us.

4. You Will Be a Blessing

In Genesis 12:2 &3, God says to Abram, "***you will be a blessing… in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed***." This morning, as we celebrate this confirmation, God says the same thing to our confirmands and to all of us. God wants us to be a blessing. How can we be a blessing? Today's New Testament lesson John 6:1-15 tell us the answer.

5. Jesus Feeds Five Thousand

John 6:1-15 talk about Jesus' feeding the five thousand. When Jesus crosses to the other side of the Sea of Galilee (that is the Sea of Tiberias), a great crowd of people follow Jesus because they see Jesus healing the sick.

When Jesus sees a great crowd coming towards him, Jesus asks Philip, "***where shall we buy bread for these people to eat***?" (verse 5) Why does Jesus ask Philip about where to buy bread? It is because Philip is from Bethsaida not far from where Jesus is visiting (1:44). Philip answers Jesus, "***six months' wages would not buy enough bread for each one to have a bite***" (verse 7). Philip reminds Jesus that the disciples do not have money and it would be impossible to feed five thousand men.

Another disciple Andrew says, "***There is a boy here who has five barley loaves and two fish. But what are they among so many people***?" (verse 9) The disciples have some things they could possibly share but the disciples don't

bring it forward because they don't think it would be enough for everyone. Yet a little boy gives what he has and makes a big difference. He becomes a blessing to many people. Five thousand men plus women and children are fed that day. Don't ask me exactly how this happened. I can't think of a reasonable explanation for how Jesus fed over 10,000 people with five loaves of barley bread and two fish.

The Bible does not explain how this happens because this is not what the author thinks is important. The important thing is that the little boy, the disciples, and all those who are fed experience the power of giving by a little boy and learn who Jesus was in the process. When was the last time did we experience the power of giving and miracles?

Last Saturday, we hosted our Strawberry Festival. I was touched by one of our Sunday School children. She brought dog biscuits and sold them. Although she was invited by her friend to a birthday party that day, she stayed for two hours. I thought she was doing for her own fundraising project, but I later found out she did this for our strawberry festival. Another child makes cookies once a month and brings them on the first Sunday of the month to share with the congregation after worship service. I am impressed by their contribution to the church. They love to share what they have with others.

Both parents of Ella, Ainslee, and David are so proud of their achievement and their hard work. We are proud of them too. I hope they keep working hard and enjoy sharing what they have with others to make a difference in the world.

6. Conclusion

When we read John's gospel chapter 6, we tend to focus on the feeding of the five thousand with five barley loaves and two fish. But if we keep reading chapter 6, we learn that this miracle happens to reveal that Jesus was the bread of life. John 6:35 says, "***I am the bread of life; whoever comes to me shall not hunger, and whoever believes in me shall never thirst***." As bread and water are essential for our physical body, Jesus is essential for our spiritual life. He is our spiritual bread that teaches us purpose in life and gives eternal life. Those who come in faith to Jesus as the bread of life find our spiritual hunger satisfied.

7. Application

I am grateful to our confirmands for their willingness to participate in the class for about 7 months and learned what the Bible says about God, Jesus, the Holy Spirit, and the United Methodist Church.

Confirmation is an important event not only for these three confirmands but also for all of us. Confirmation is a new chapter in our lives and a time to give thanks to God for all His blessings. It is also a time to make the commitment to follow God's directions. I hope that Ella, Ainslee, and David become blessings to many people. As they share their blessings with others, we pray that many would come to Christ. We praise God for training and using them for His kingdom. Amen.