

I was sitting upstairs in the office struggling to get the computer to work. My computer at the parsonage was not set up and I was very frustrated. I was hot and tired, there was barely a breeze coming through, and I was frazzled.

I felt like a fish out of water. I was missing my friends and I was up to my ears in boxes. Thank God all roads lead to Route 3A.

So, I was sitting in the office trying to figure out the computer and the copy machine and I heard this knock. Well, Ted, thank you very much, had been telling me how the church has a ghost. And the Wednesday night Bible study group, thank you very much, had been telling me stories of flushing toilets and rolling pencils and my heart started to pound. And I heard a knock.

I got up, no doubt, looking like a deer in the headlights and called out "Hello".  
No answer.

I peered down the stairs to the bathroom fully expecting some apparition to come floating by. Relieved I ran back to the office, coming this close to closing the door, but well, you know the size of that office... Anyway, I went back to inserts and I heard the knock again.

"Hello", I called out.

No answer.

Now my skin was crawling, my heart was pounding, my stomach started turning and I was just about to run out of the building when I heard the knock again. Well, I was about to jump out of my skin but something told me to look outside. So, I did. Nothing. Ok I thought, I'm out of here. Then a knock again and this time when I looked out I saw her.

A woman, looking tired and worn.

"Hello" I called from the window, relieved, but still wary.

"Oh", she said, "can you help me? I am so hungry I haven't had anything to eat in 3 days. Someone told me your church might be able to help."

"Oh my", I said Well, I'm new here, so I don't know how the food pantry works, but let me go and get you a bag of groceries. Wait... wait there", I said.

I stood in front of the glass doors downstairs and I found myself thinking, "What would I want if I was hungry?"

Does she even have a kitchen? Does she have a pot or a can opener? Maybe she's living on the street. Is she all alone? I searched the cabinets and thought, "Well, let me choose what needs the least preparation, food that could be eaten right out of the can."

I put it all in a bag and started for the door. And honestly, it was still a little scary for me, opening that door. The world today, well, it puts fear in your heart. Fear of the stranger. Fear of "other", so I opened the door with a prayer and saw her, I saw how the world had taken its toll on her; the weathered skin, the frazzled hair, the sunken eyes, her extended belly and thin, thin legs.

"You don't know what you've done." she said.

My heart broke as I looked into her face. Her gratitude put me to shame.

I went back to the office and finished up, relieved there wasn't a ghost, thank you very much, and was about to leave when the phone rang. A man started telling me about how he had just lost his job. He'd been out sick for a few days and when he returned there was no job. Gone, vanished, they had closed shop and moved on. He had a family, no savings, and well, someone said this church would help. He didn't have a car and I was about to leave, so I said, "Where are you?"

We arranged to meet in front of the car wash down the street. Again, I traveled down the stairs and stood in front of the pantry. Three kids. The food groups went through my mind and I tried to figure out how to do that in canned food. I spotted a box of cereal. Peanut Butter, an all time favorite and good protein. Macaroni and cheese, can't lose with that. Spaghetti and sauce, green beans and a can of peaches. I carried the two bags of groceries and put them in my car.

"Thank you Pastor, thank you." he said. "You don't know what you've done."

A nice looking man, tattoos on his arms, good honest eyes. He told me how good God had been to him. A troubled teenager, he'd ended up in prison, but had turned himself around with the help of God.

"A few years ago I would have been robbing a bank right now," he said, "but instead I called the church and asked for help."

"Praise God for that", I said, "I am so glad I was still there."

I fought back tears as we stood and talked, his faith was so strong. I knew without a doubt that God was at work.

What am I doing here? I had thought sitting in the office. What ever made me think I could do this?

"Oh, I could tell you powerful stories of how God has changed my life. I could come to your church and witness to the transforming power of Christ."

"I would love that", I said.

"Thank you pastor",

"No, thank you" I said, full of gratitude, "You have ministered to me today. You have fed me."

"You do it", Jesus said. All the disciples are standing around getting nervous 'cause there's just too many mouths to feed. Their nerves are frayed. Can you imagine being in a crowd of 5000 people?

It must have been like Woodstock. A ground cover of people: sitting, standing, sleeping, a sea of bodies for as far as the eye could see, all clamoring to get a glimpse of Jesus .

"It's late, send them away", they said, " Let them go and buy something to eat"

"You give them something to eat", says Jesus, "You do it."

The disciples are so tired. They love Jesus but they've already put in a good days work. They've put themselves out enough. They just want to sit around the fire, put their feet up and relax. They didn't have a clue what to do. I mean Jesus always did it himself, they just stood by and watched in awe and amazement as he healed the blind, the lame and even raised folk from the dead.

What was he talking about? You feed them? How? Dumbfounded and confused, they just stood there.

Jesus looked at his disciples, his chosen ones, the ones he was entrusting with his words and he saw a teachable moment. You know, an opportunity to see things differently.

“Ah”, Jesus said, “Just bring me what you've got”

Jesus looked out and saw a sea of souls following him. Some so far away they could not possibly have heard his voice. And yet, they had come, without thought of food or shelter, without a thought of themselves; they had come to be near him. Old and young women under the shade of trees, mothers with babies on their hips, children running and playing, men discussing what Jesus had taught them. He looked out and saw the ones making a good living and the ones struggling to make ends meet. He saw the frightened and the weary, the silenced and the self-righteous. He saw the homeless and the alcoholic, and the ones with diseases no one wanted to talk about. He saw the ones with green hair and pierced tongues. He saw the ones in suits and the ones in T-shirts. He saw the ones with eating disorders, and scarred wrists and thighs. He saw hearts that were full and hearts that were empty. He saw us all ...and he said, “You do it. You feed them.”

Manna could have poured down from heaven. Food could have magically appeared in everyone's lap. Streams of water could have broken forth from rocks. But instead He multiplied what came from them.

He said, “Give what you've got. Walk among the people, and give all you've got.”

You see, it's in the giving that we ourselves are give, in the seeing that we ourselves are seen, in the feeding that we ourselves are fed. It's how we remember who and whose we are. It's how, salvation works.

He took his life and he broke it and he said, “Eat, drink, in memory of me.”

“You don't know what you've done”, they said.

“No, no, it is you who have saved me”, I thought.

Thanks be to God.

Amen