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YOU GOTTA HAVE HEART

by Pastor Clarissa Martinelli

(Adapted from Dr. William S. Barnes)

John 6: 9-11 *there is a boy here who has five barley loaves and two fish. But what are they among so many people?" 10Jesus 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. 11Then 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.*

Where does God get these characters? The Bible is a catalog of God finding the most unlikely people to cooperate in God's work. They include cheaters, liars, even murderers. They include people from hardly-on-the-map towns, people born of parents of no distinction, and people without impressive resumes or track records. They include the runt of Jesse's litter from the backwater town of Bethlehem. "People look at the outward appearance, but the LORD looks at the heart."

One of the catchiest and most successful ad campaigns in recent years has been the one where celebrities from all walks of life simply stand in front of a camera with a white smear above their lips. The ad simply asks, "Got Milk?"

Today's message simply asks, "Gotta Have Heart?" because in order to be a faithful disciple of Jesus, you gotta have heart.

There is a mold or model for giving that we find in the scripture today. The mold is in the shape of a boy. By the way, have you ever taken notice of how often Jesus lifts up children as just about the only ones who innately understand how it looks to live in the Kingdom of God? He told the fussy advocates of "Children are to be seen, and not heard" to let the kids come to him, and as he scooped them up into his arms, he said, "The Kingdom belongs to these guys. And unless you start acting like they do, you don't have chance of ever seeing that Kingdom, much less living in it." So the story of the feeding of the five thousand is as much about that boy as it is about the buffet.

The gospel writers had no interest in telling us how the miracle occurred. Their decision to leave out those details tells us that the focus of that amazing event was

not on the food itself, but rather on the compassion of Jesus, on the spiritual aspect of sufficiency, and the unlimited blessing that comes from giving. In John's gospel, dead center in the story is the boy with his snack. All of the gospel writers report that it was the compassion of Jesus for all of the people who had come to him that prompted the miracle, and all of them likewise report that his action to feed them was not only sufficient for their need, but produced a dozen baskets of leftovers. Only John tells us where the loaves and fish came from, and in that child's gift are some timeless truths about the heart we all should have about giving.

The vast majority of us give from the head and not the heart. We are more motivated by what we "think" we can give based on what we want to keep for ourselves than we are motivated by what we are able to give for others based on the spiritual truths we claim for ourselves. You gotta have heart, not just your mind. Let me remind you of three of those spiritual truths that we see in the gift of that boy's five loaves and two fish.

First, what you have counts in the kingdom of God. Even the disciples had a hard time with this one. One of the most practical of the twelve, Peter's brother Andrew said, "There is a boy here with five loaves and two fish, but what good is that with so many people?" It is actually no good until you put it into the hands of Jesus, until you offer it to the Lord of possibilities. Then everything counts because there is no limit to what God can do with it. The boy gave everything he had that evening. His Mom had made his lunch and sent him on his way to find work and bring home what he could to provide for the family. But hearing the Word of Christ, he willingly and lovingly gave all that he had. And in the story of the widow who made her offering at the Temple, even though she gave the smallest coin with the least value, Jesus reminds those who watched her give it that she gave everything she had. The point is not to give meagerly, but to give wholeheartedly, knowing that everything you have counts for something in the kingdom of God, no matter how insignificant you may think it is.

Secondly, what you give changes the way things are in the world. The boy's heart for giving what he had changed the way things were that day. Before, people were hungry; afterwards, they were filled. Before, they questioned who Jesus was; afterwards they hailed him as a prophet and tried to make him their king. Before, they were observers of miracles; afterwards some say they were the miracle themselves. One of the theories that many Biblical scholars suggest about the "how" of this story is that people actually did have food with them, having come out from many miles and villages to this remote place to see Jesus. But only the boy was willing to share what he had. His example moved the hearts of those who

had at first refused to give when the disciples went through the crowd. And when everyone who had something gave something, there was more than enough to go around. The miracle was in the change of heart of the people. Whenever you give, you are changing the way things are in the world. And for the most part the way things are in the world is not the way God wants them to be. Giving for kingdom work changes everything, one "thing" at a time.

And third, what you release comes back to bless you. Someone in that boy's family, maybe even he himself, knew how to fish. This was a case of "catch and release." Now, usually catch and release means to hook a fish and then release it back into the lake, but in this case the catch was released into the hands of Jesus. It is a principle of spiritual economics that when you give, you receive; when you bless others, you are blessed. The boy's gift of his lunch resulted in a banquet for everyone, including himself. Even he apparently received more than he gave. There has never been a time in my life when giving diminished my life. It has always blessed my life.

Stewardship – all forms – time, talents and tithes. As we continue to go forward into 2014, let's with gratefully and joyous hearts be good stewards to all that God has entrusted to each of us -

Christ has no hands but our hands to do His work today
He has no feet but our feet to lead men in the way
He has no tongue but our tongue to tell men how He died
He has no help but our help to bring them to His side.

We are the only Bible the careless world will read,
We are the sinner's gospel; we are the scoffer's creed;
We are the Lord's last message, given in word and deed;
What if the type is crooked? What if the print is blurred?

What if our hands are busy with other work than His?
What if our feet are walking where sin's allurements is?
What if our tongue is speaking of things His lips would spurn?
How can we hope to help Him or welcome His return?
—Annie Johnston Flint

It can be a matter of your head or your heart, that decision is up to you. Just remember that whatever you have counts in the Kingdom, and giving it changes the way things are in this troubled world. Remember where your heart is, there will

be your treasure. Release what you have caught, and you will be blessed in ways you can only describe as miraculous.

AMEN.AMEN.AMEN.