

**Message**  
**July 25-26, 2009**  
**Ephesians 3:14-21; John 6:1-21**  
**A Great Way of Life**  
**Hillary T. West**

About a week and a half ago, a bunch of us met a woman named Debbie. Debbie likes to organize things, keep things in order. She searched and searched, not quite sure how to use this gift. Then, one day she stumbled across the Food Bank. Debbie learned that she could come to the Food Bank and stack cans. So, she did. Now Debbie comes three days a week. She organizes and stacks cans, and Debbie teaches groups the procedure for stacking cans: Beans in one bin, tuna in another, tomatoes in another and applesauce in another; hundreds and hundreds of cans. Walking down the aisles of the Food Bank, you see the result of Debbie's efforts. Each colorful bin looks like Andy Warhol pop art. When you bring in your canned goods next week, because it will be the first weekend of the month and that's when we're intentional about bringing canned goods, they'll be delivered to the Food Bank and Debbie will make sure they get stacked. Debbie smiles when she talks about her cans. Using her gifts with the Food Bank is Debbie's way of saying, thank you Lord, for the joy of serving you. Debbie lives A Great Way of Life.

Becky Hansel lives a great way of life also. You heard her powerful testimony this morning. Becky chooses to live a life filled with joy and its opened up all kinds of new possibilities for how she serves.

Today, I'd like to talk with you a bit about living a Great Way of Life. On September 13, Christ Church will celebrate its 16<sup>th</sup> birthday. We'll be celebrating that day with a great big, on the lawn, old fashioned picnic, with games for kids and families and music. We're going to give thanks for how in these 16 years, Christ Church has gathered to give thanks in worship somewhere around 3,000 times; how God calls us to serve through more than 30 mission trips and dozens of outreach opportunities. How, when challenges come before us, we don't say, can't be done; instead we say, how can we do it? For how we care for one another, reaching out through prayer, food, and visits; for how we grow and grow through Kid's Quest, a top notch preschool, small groups for youth and adults, EFM, DOCC, bible studies, and music. This is the picture of Christ Church. It's the same picture we see with Jesus on the hillside; a faithful flock, eager to be inviting, growing and living in the blessing of God in Christ, and give thanks.

It's a popular and familiar story, the feeding of the 5,000, so popular all four gospel writers have their own version. Multitudes are following Jesus. In fact, in Mark's gospel, they're so excited to be with Jesus, they're running the 9 miles around the tip of the Sea of Galilee to be with him. They know that Jesus gives signs, miracles that stir up their faith in him, the Messiah, the one who saves. They're witnesses to Jesus' healing and teaching and preaching about kingdom living. They're soaking it up like bees on honey and there's no way they're leaving his side. In John's gospel the faithful have come for the Passover Feast, the traditional festival where all gather to celebrate their redemption from bondage and give thanks to God for freeing them from the prison of

slavery. Passover, is a sign of hope and promise. It's a time of joyful celebration for the wonders God works in our lives.

And now, we're given another sign of God's hope and promise.

The crowd gathers, knowing they're in the midst of something truly holy. Maybe some of these folks were at the wedding at Cana in Galilee, where Jesus performs his first sign, changing water into wine, revealing his glory. Or maybe they got wind of the court official's son, who, at death's door, was made well through Jesus' simple words, his second sign.

Or maybe the crowd was at the Pool of Bethesda at the temple when a cripple of 38 years commanded by Jesus gets up and walks. By this fourth sign, the feeding of the 5,000, Jesus' message is circulating and the crowds are swelling. In Mark's gospel, the day is coming to an end. It's getting dark, and it's time to eat. The disciples want to send everyone home. No one seems ready to leave. Jesus, always the faithful servant, has a solution.

The disciples need a service project. The other gospel stories tell us that Jesus extends the invitation. He says to the disciples, "*you* give them something to eat". He's not interested in micro managing. There's too much work to do. Instead, he equips us to serve. Jesus asks Philip to figure out how to feed the crowd. Philip counts the change in his pocket. He'd have to work for 6 months to afford to pay for this group to eat! Serving as agents of Jesus is not a solitary effort. We never serve without his help. Andrew, forever the optimist, comes across a boy with 5 loaves and 2 fish and immediately turns to Jesus looking for an answer. Get everybody comfortable, Jesus says. Sit down, and relax for a filling meal.

We never know when or how the opportunity to serve in grateful thanks will present itself. But, that's how it is with Jesus. He asks the very best of us, when we may well believe we have nothing to offer. For this most unlikely young boy, he's happy to serve; happy to give what little he has to the glory of God. He comes before Jesus, and makes his offering, giving thanks that Jesus uses whatever we have to offer, and it will be enough.

Taking the boy's bread and the fish, he gives thanks to God and distributes it to the crowd; hints of our very sacred meal of thanksgiving we celebrate today, in the Holy Eucharist. All are fed, as many as 5,000. Fed enough to put smiles on their faces and lean back in the soft, green grass rubbing their stomachs, staring up at the starlit night time sky and saying, thank you God for how you fill us with the wonder of your mysterious meal. Thank you for how in your generous giving there's always enough, an abundance.

Something pretty powerful happens with Jesus and that holy meal on that hillside. Not just the miracle of a small bit of plain peasant bread and dried fish multiplied to feed 5,000. Rather, 5,000 sick, broken and frightened, fed with holy food that, through God in Christ, are transformed into grateful, joyfilled servants, strengthened and empowered to

set out into the world to serve. So, down the hillside they come, rejoicing in the power of Jesus and ready to name Jesus as their king and savior.

We're a part of that hillside celebration. We're the ones, climbing up that mountainside in search of the one who brings healing strength to our brokenness, who, with the miracle of a simple meal, fills us with hope and joy, blessing us with another day rich with endless possibilities. That's how it works. When filled with Jesus, we don't stand idle. We don't hide his Spirit under a bushel. We live out loud for Jesus. We go out and serve.

Now, over these next weeks, in thanksgiving for how God has so enriched our lives, we're going to talk a lot about serving; about what it means to be mouthpieces and hands and feet for Jesus. Service wears a lot of different hats. In your bulletin, you have a flyer telling of many opportunities to serve. I'd like to offer you a challenge. Outside, on the sidewalk, you noticed a Big White Tent, on your way in this morning. Under the tent, faithful members of the Outreach/Mission ministry team are waiting to invite you to serve over the next weeks. Following worship check out the offerings and sign up. Then, come to the birthday party on September 13, and celebrate transformed lives that come from how God calls us to give our hearts, our time, our whole selves in his name. Trust in Jesus who gives us what we need to live a life of service.

Last Monday, I traveled to Washington to spend time with our grand babies and our daughter. On the way to the park, we stopped in a shop for ice cream. A city bus stopped just outside. As people poured out into the crowded street, a blind man found his way off the bus. He tapped around trying to get his bearings. Finally, a homeless man who had been perched against a wall stood up and approached the man. He gently leaned into his ear. They shared a few words and off they went, arm in arm, down 14<sup>th</sup> street, smiles on their faces, the blind man relieved to be guided and a faithful servant happy to be an offering.

The call to serve, is not about getting a list of things accomplished. The call to serve, no matter how great or how small, is about responding with grateful hearts to the God within us.

Serving is a way of living, a discipline. You may wish to prepare with some prayer time. You have with you today, in your bulletin, a home devotional. Take it with you, and share the devotional this week with those in your household. Use this devotional, if you like, at your gathering time, at the dinner table, before bedtime, at the breakfast table. Enjoy the exercise. Invite God in Christ into your household and be surprised by his abundant love.

Donald Miller, in his book, Blue Like Jazz, tells the story of a man, named Bill. Bill runs a bed and breakfast for people who "do ministry". He has a thankless job. Day after day Bill cooks and scrubs and cleans. One day the author asked Bill how he maintained an attitude of such patience and kindness. Bill got eye to eye with Don and said, "If we are

not willing to wake up in the morning and die to ourselves, perhaps we should ask ourselves whether or not we are really following Jesus.””

Jesus invites us to come, and serve. He feeds us abundantly with his love and mercy. It's an extraordinary love, for which we give great thanks and discover the freedom of A Great Way of Life.