

August 3, 2014
Matthew 14:13-21
“Giving Away What I Need”

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One of the hardest things to do in life, for most of us, is to give away something that you really need. This is my favorite candy bar, Snickers. If I have ten of these, and I've just eaten a big meal, I'd be happy to give these candy bars away. But if I only have one Snickers, and if I'm starving, and if I see Joe here who looks hungry, I don't know if I'd give it away. I need it myself. I'm really hungry. Maybe Joe should run over to Sheetz and get his own Snickers bar. Giving away what I need is hard to do.

I remember a man named Henry knocking on the door of my office one day, a few years ago, at my former congregation. Henry was a homeless man who lived in our neighborhood. I had talked to him many times, and we had a good connection. It was a bitter cold, snowy day, and I opened the door to see Henry standing there freezing, shivering, with no coat. I invited him in, and asked him, “Henry, where's your coat?” “Someone stole it last night at the train station,” he told me.

And, would you believe, that week I was working on a sermon, using the Bible verse where Jesus says, “If someone asks you for your tunic, **give them your coat**, too.” Now, Henry didn't ask me for my coat, but this Bible verse was ringing in my head as I talked with him. Long story short, I ended up giving Henry my winter coat, which I loved – an Eddie Bauer goose down jacket, dark green, nice and soft, the perfect weight. And even though I think God was nudging me to give that coat away, and even though I could easily afford to buy a replacement coat, I still had a hard time

giving it to Henry. I still miss that coat, whenever it's cold outside.

Giving away what we need is hard. Human nature teaches us to hang on tight to what we have, to grab hold of what we need and to let others fend for themselves. We're all wired that way, aren't we?

Think about our Bible story with me, for a minute. Jesus is surrounded by thousands of people who were so excited to see him that they forgot to plan ahead for dinner. Suddenly, the sun's going down, everybody's hungry; and there's no diners, drive-ins, or dives around. No place to eat, no food to be found ... except for five little loaves of bread and two fish. Another part of the Bible tells us that it was a young boy, out of all that mob, who had brought this meager meal along. Jesus asks for this little kid's Happy Meal to be brought to him.

Now, what if that young boy had said, "No way, Jesus! You're not taking my food. I need this for myself." What would Jesus have done then? Probably he would've laughed, patted the kid on the back, and then done an even greater miracle.

But the Bible story tells us – and this is amazing to me every time I read this -- that the young boy gave away his food. He gave away what he really needed. He was hungry. He was a long way from home. He didn't know what Jesus was going to do with his loaves and fishes. But he gave them away anyway, and his simple action of trust was all Jesus needed to miraculously feed several thousand hungry people with that young boy's gift.

Have you ever been in a situation where you have had the opportunity do that? To give away something you really

need? Giving a little -- when you've got a lot -- is one thing. Sharing a loaf of bread with a soup kitchen -- when you're going home to eat a steak dinner -- isn't a hard thing to do. Donating money to your church -- when you just got a raise, your bills are all paid up, and your retirement fund is bulging -- is not so difficult. But giving and sharing and donating something you really, truly need? That's a serious challenge.

A funny thing often happens, though, when we do give away what we think we need. **God has a way of providing even more.** Have some of you experienced that to be true? I have, and I know many of you have. Did you know that here at Hope we send 10% of our church offerings to ministries and church-at-large programs outside of our own walls? Sometimes we can't help thinking, "We could sure use that money here." But this congregation has learned through the years, and we are living it out still today, that when we do give away even what we need, God has a way of providing for us.

And I'm not just talking about money here. Sometimes, as Christians, we are called to sacrifice our time and our attention -- and, instead of focusing it on ourselves and our needs, Jesus asks us to focus on others. I heard recently that the average American today spends eleven hours a day connected to some digital device. Maybe some of that time could be better spent connected to some other people -- hurting souls needing care, lonely people needing love, lost sheep needing to be found by Christ. Many of you are doing that, engaged in Christian ministry work during the week, and your lives are richly and powerfully blessed by that, aren't they? That's God providing for us!

Giving away what we need is really an action of trust in God, isn't it? He's blessed me with mercy and forgiveness for my sins -- how can I be stingy when it comes to forgiving others?

I need to trust that his way is the right way for me, too. God provides to me every day food, shelter, clothing, loved ones, money, a job -- a great job! I need to trust that – even if I give away things I think I need – my Lord is going to take care of me somehow. And he does! And he will for you, too.

Giving away what we need is hard to do – but it's an action of trust in God. He gave away everything, didn't he, when he sent his Son to die for us. And, through Christ, God gives us his promises, he gives us his Word, he gives us hope, he gives us forgiveness, he gives us our church family, he gives us purpose for living every day, he gives us help and support when we're suffering, he gives us the assurance of eternal life even when we're dying ... God give us everything we really need!

So can I trust him when I give away my last Snickers bar? Can I trust my awesome, loving God when I give up my favorite coat? Can I trust the Lord enough to give an extra hour or two of my time this week, looking to the needs of others instead of my own needs?

Giving away what we need is hard; but it's an action of trust in our great God, who provides us with what we really need. Amen.