

Core Strength Sermon Series
Generosity - John 6:1-13
October 12, 2025
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What do you value in life? If we burn away all the debris and remove all the bling and clear out the non-essentials, what do you value? What is most important in life? That's the question our Faithful Planning Team sought to answer for Crestwood. Through their work surveying the congregation and the groups we work with, the team identified six core values of our church: generosity, welcoming, authenticity, engagement, curiosity, and a commitment to outreach. Those values are both descriptive and aspirational, so for this sermon series, we're going to do a deep dive on each one to see where we are living them out and where we have room for growth. Coincidentally, on this Commitment Sunday, we're starting with generosity.

I'm sure you've heard our story today. It's the only miracle that is in all four gospels, which for me lends to its authenticity. It's often invoked at church potlucks when more people show up than signed up. Someone will look at the crowd, then survey the pans of broccoli casserole and jiggling Jello molds, and ask nervously, "Do we have enough food?" and another person will answer, "Loaves and fish." Then, everyone nods in knowing agreement. "Yes, loaves and fish." I've never been to a church potluck where we actually ran out of food. There's always Jello mold left over. God provides. Loaves and fish.

But not everyone in this story trusts that. Jesus asks Phillip, "Where are we going to buy bread for these people?" and Phillip responds, probably a little huffily, "Jesus, you know money doesn't grow on fig trees. Even if we had six months' wages, we wouldn't have enough money to buy bread for everyone here." I have no problem with that answer. It's a perfectly logical response to Jesus' question. It's simple math. Five loaves and two fish wouldn't feed five people, let alone 5000.

We are all guilty of doing what the disciples are doing. They are operating from a theology of scarcity. When you do this, no matter how much you have, you never think it's enough. So, you hold onto what you have, not sharing it with others, not meeting the needs of those around you. You always worry that your potluck will run out of food. And even when it doesn't the first time, or the second time, or the tenth time, you're just sure that NEXT time there won't be enough. Yes, yes, I know God will provide and all that. That sounds good when you're reading the story in a book, but it's a different ballgame when there's a crowd pressing in on you that's moving from hungry to hangry and you barely have enough food for a sack lunch. It's not enough, Jesus. It's not enough.

But Phillip forgot a crucial variable in this vexing conundrum. He forgot he was talking to the Great Mathematician. Phillip was trying to do multiplication without the X factor. Because when you toss Jesus into the equation, the numbers don't add up. Five loaves plus two fish times Jesus equals enough food for an arena of people, with 12 basketfuls left over. Just like a church potluck. "Loaves and fish." "Yes, loaves and fish."

Instead of a theology of scarcity, what Jesus is doing with the disciples is teaching them to live with a theology of abundance. When you do this, your life is guided by trust and generosity, because you know that no matter how much you have, it will be enough, and God often gives us way more than enough so we can share it with others. Living with a theology of abundance can be exhilarating, because it releases us from our dependence on possessions and

frees us to add Jesus to the equation. I've read about and seen this at work, and it is one of the most powerful things to behold. It gives us hope beyond reason.

One Sunday, one of our youngsters came up to me after church, waited until I had talked to everyone in line, and then handed me an envelope. She said with the most earnest look on her face, "Pastor Kory, please give this to the poor." Inside the envelope was a crumpled-up dollar bill. I know she believed in her heart that her dollar bill could really make a difference. Now, you may be thinking, what difference can a dollar make? Probably not much. But with a dollar and Jesus...who knows how many people could be fed?

After Phillip tells Jesus that it's impossible to feed everyone, Andrew says, "There is a boy here who has five barley loaves and two fish. But what are they among so many people?" If Andrew didn't think Jesus could do something with that boy's lunch, why bring it up? But I believe Andrew had faith – maybe as small as a mustard seed – that Jesus only needed a little to provide a feast. When you add Jesus to the equation, there's always reason to have hope.

John tells us that once Jesus blessed the food and distributed it, the people all ate as much as they wanted. The original Greek translates to, "They ate more than enough." You ever felt that way after a Thanksgiving meal? You lean back in your chair, pat your belly, and say, "Woo! I ate too much," and then you watch the Cowboys lose to whoever they are playing. And then a half-hour later you're making a turkey sandwich. When Jesus is in charge of the food, you eat more than enough and there are still leftovers.

When my girls were little, we would say how much we loved each other in a way that it became a competition. "I love you times 10." "Oh yeah? I love you times 100!" I would say, "Well, I love you times infinity!" thinking I had gone as high as I could go. But, inevitably, one of my girls would say, "Well, I love you infinity plus one." Mic drop! She got me. That's God's math. That's Jesus's generosity. We not only have enough, we have more than enough, we have infinity plus one from God. Why do we think finitely – do we have enough? – when we serve an infinite God?

Our world tells us to hold onto everything we have, because we may need it someday. But our God tells us that there are people out there who need it right now, and we have been given more than enough. More than enough love. More than enough grace. More than enough acceptance. More than enough stuff. More than enough food. You may have a lot to give. You may only have a little to give. The amount doesn't matter. What matters is the spirit in which you give it.

At Crestwood, we are filled with a spirit of generosity, so much that it is one of our core values. We give a minimum of 10% of our operating budget every year to outreach, sometimes much more than that. When we received an incredibly generous bequest a few years ago, we set up a grant process so we could start giving away the income we earned to local non-profits. Last year we gave away \$224,000 and are proposing to give away around that same amount this year. We are generous with our time and our talent, serving God by serving others in a variety of ways. I'm so proud to serve a church that lives out God's call to be generous in such faithful ways.

You know, people have tried to explain away this loaves and fish miracle by saying that it wasn't really a supernatural multiplication. They say what actually happened was that when the crowd saw that a little boy was willing to share his food, they also took out what they had brought, and when everyone's food was combined together, there was more than enough to go around. It's the first church potluck! If that is how it actually happened, I would say that it was still a miracle. The fact that people were willing to open their hands and share their only

sustenance for the well-being of others is pretty miraculous. It's a theology of abundance, a belief that whatever we have is enough. The value of generosity in action.

To be honest, I believe that is what actually happened. If Jesus wanted to multiply the loaves and the fish, he could have done it. If Jesus wanted to make the fish jump up and dance the Macarena, he could have done it. But I believe Jesus didn't want to just show people a miracle, like they were the audience at a magic show. I believe Jesus wanted to encourage people to BE the miracle, to leave behind their shackles of "not enough," to embrace the belief that when Jesus is involved, there's always enough.

Jesus offers the same invitation to us, one that we extend each Sunday and during this stewardship campaign. You are invited to be part of the miracle, to participate in moving from scarcity to abundance. But in order for God's math to work in our lives, we have to be willing to give some things over. Jesus couldn't have multiplied the bread and fish had they not been given into his hands to bless, break, and share. The crowd could have hoarded what they had, which would have ensured two things: (1) they would have had something to eat, and (2) no one else would have. God can't work with what we're not willing to give back to God. But when we give, God can do amazing things.

We are more than just a collection of individuals. We are more than people who like being together. We are the body of Christ, called to be Jesus' hands and feet and heart in this hurting, divisive world. We are Crestwood Christian Church, making a difference in Lexington and beyond to the glory of God. Generosity is a core value for us, always calling us forward to grow in what we give and how we support God's work. Each stewardship campaign, each invitation to offering, is a call for us to grow in our generosity, to continue saving lives in Jesus' name. What are we going to do about it? Are we going to hold on to what we have? Or are we going to open our hands so our bread can be, taken, blessed, and shared by Jesus? Is there really enough for everyone? Sometimes it doesn't seem like it. But your generosity tells a different story, doesn't it? There is enough. Loaves and fish. Yes, loaves and fish.