

More than we can imagine

(Preached by Cheryl Williams at Footscray Baptist, July 28th, 2024 - John 6:1-14 & Ephesians 3:1-14)

In the 1960's a tired black woman (Rosa Parks), took a seat on a bus, and this led to the Civil Rights Movement in USA and significant changes being made to the rules of the land.

In the past few weeks, a food van pulls into our carpark, to hand out frozen meat for up to 100 people. As they wait, they are offered a cup of tea or coffee and a biscuit. This simple act then leads to many conversations and opportunities to provide a listening ear, some practical assistance, some reassurance, some compassion.

Two thousand years ago a little boy offered to share his packed lunch with the disciples, generous, yet it is obvious it is grossly inadequate for the task, or so it seems. With the help of Jesus more than 5000 are fed and twelve baskets of leftovers are gathered up.

Jesus had been attempting to get away from it all but the people continue to follow because they have heard about the signs he has been performing. In the end, a large crowd forms and Jesus realises how hungry they must be, so he poses a question to his disciples about feeding them all. Philip sensibly notes that it is not possible to feed them all. Andrew is offered the lunch of a small boy, bread and fish, but notes its inadequacy in the face of such great need. Jesus accepts the boys small offering and gets everybody sitting down and then he shares the food amongst them all after giving thanks to God for it. Everyone has enough to eat and there are baskets of leftovers.

Just a couple of examples of God doing abundantly more than we ask or imagine.

The little boy gave from his heart all he had, a generous offering. He allowed his offering to be utterly transformed by God.

Is God calling us to do the same - to be magnanimous and give up what we have in order that it might be transformed and so many, many more might experience the love that is God?

What do we have to offer for God's mission?

- a) Individually – time, voice, skills
- b) as a church – property, welcome, generosity

Perhaps we need to simply offer it and wait to see how God will use it? To see the way in which God will do abundantly more than we can ask or imagine.

Let's engage in an imaginative exercise as we think about the height, length, breadth and depth of God's love for people. Let us consider how God might take what we offer, perhaps with fear and trepidation, and see what is possible.

First, think about what you can offer to God for his work in the world.

Your time.

Your voice to stand up for others, to stand up for justice.

Your skills – gardener, cooking, music, mechanic, woodwork etc.

What might happen?

How could your skills or abilities be used?

Where could they be used?

Now, let's think about what we as a church, small in number we may be, could offer.

What might happen if we threw open the doors of the hall during the week?

- to serve morning tea, lunch or a community meal for those who line up for frozen meat, or
- to provide activities and a warm space (board games, art, craft) for those who are lonely, or
- to start a men's shed, or
- for a youth drop in service

In all these situations I imagine a welcoming and caring community for those who struggle forming.

What if we transformed our property into a children's centre? I can imagine children playing and enjoying life, community being built.

What might happen if we opened the back gates and installed garden beds and grew vegetables for the community (St. John's over the road have just been given funds to revamp their garden for such a purpose)? I can imagine people sharing produce, cooking for each other, building community.

What might happen if we offered the sanctuary for concerts? I imagine a welcoming place where people can be encouraged in their playing and where others might find a place of solace.

What if we transformed our property into houses for the homeless? I imagine a place where the needy are provided with shelter, warmth and a new community in which they can belong, where they can experience dignity and be settled.

What raw materials do we have to offer for God's work?

How could God use those offerings?

As we approach our time of church review, we will have the opportunity to think about what we have as church and how we could offer it to God and the wider community so all might experience the deep love of God. We need to trust that God can use whatever we offer, no matter how tentatively we offer it, not matter how big or small the offering is. Sure, we might need to work on the details, but let's begin to dream together. Let's take

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some risks and fly some kites. Let's be creative. What might God be calling us to do and be?

Jesus looked out at the crowd and saw their hunger, both spiritual and physical and responded to that.

We too have many people who gather on the property or walk past the door. How do we offer what we have to meet whatever their needs are? How might we use what we have to reveal the height, length, depth, and breadth of God's love for the world? What can we offer to God so that others too might be filled until they are satisfied, with the abundant love of God?

Let us then prayerfully consider how we offer what we have as a community to God – may it be with a generous heart and open hands, trusting God to transform it.

Let us offer ourselves and all we have, to Jesus who in the words of Paul, is by the power of the Holy Spirit able to accomplish abundantly far more than we can ask or imagine.