

Sermon for Sunday, November 12, 1978, by Dr. Andrew A. Jumper, D.D., Pastor  
Central Presbyterian Church, St. Louis, Missouri

"JESUS AND THE SACK LUNCH"

St. John 6:1-14; St. Mark 12:3-9

Text: "There is a lad here who has five barley loaves and two fish; but what are they among so many?" St. John 6:9

Our church believes in the tithe. We preach the tithe and teach the tithe because that's what the Bible says. If we are going to be serious about what the Bible says about morality; if we are going to be serious about what the Bible says about salvation and eternal life; then we have to be serious about what the Bible says about our money. Today is a big event in the life of Central. No budget in the history of the church begins to approach our budget for 1979. But the amount of the budget is not really important. To ask the question, "how much is our budget", is to ask the wrong question. Sometimes you can ask the right question and get the wrong answer. It's like the man sitting in his living room reading the paper and wondering what time it was. He heard his little four year old son in the kitchen and asked him, "Johnny, what is the big hand on?" There was a stunned silence and then a guilty little voice replied, "on the chocolate cookie." Right question, wrong answer! But when you ask the right question, the Bible always gives you the right answer! There are several questions that we can and should ask and each of them is a "right" question. One question is, "how much does God want me to give?" That's a "right" question and the Bible has a very specific and right answer--a tithe. Another question is, "how much does our church need to do the program God calls us to offer?" And the answer is this: the program we ought to provide is however much program a tithe will pay for. So, as long as you are asking the right question, the answer is always a tithe!

I have preached a number of sermons on tithing this year. And God is using those sermons to touch people's hearts and lives. This past week I have gotten several letters from members--a number of them new members--who have written to say, "Thank you for telling it straight about tithing. We have begun to tithe and our lives have been blessed." You have heard several laymen tell how they have committed themselves to the Lord and begun to tithe. Just last night a member of the church and I were working together in a wedding. He said to me, "You've been on my back all week." I didn't know what he meant and said so. He replied, "All week I've been thinking about tithing. Just this morning I made up my mind. Next year I am going to tithe." He went on to say that he had always been a good contributor to the church, but that when he started tithing, his giving would almost double. I suspect that is what will happen to the giving of a lot of us when we begin to tithe.

Well, it is exciting to be a part of this congregation and to see God moving in so many lives! A couple who joined our church about six weeks ago stopped me a couple of Sundays ago to tell me they had started tithing and what a blessing it has been to their lives. So, a little later on this morning when we come to the time when we make our commitment for next year, I pray that God will lay it on your heart to tithe.

What I really want to talk about this morning is commitment--not just of money, but of life itself. In our Scripture reading this morning we read the story of a woman who crashed a dinner party given in honor of Jesus and anointed him with some expensive perfume. Now, as nearly as I can tell, there were three groups of people at that dinner party. One group was the Pharisees or townspeople who had been invited to the party. A second group was the disciples of Jesus who were with him at that time. The third group is represented by the woman who did what Jesus called a beautiful thing.

Let's think for a moment about these groups and the level of their commitment. The first group is the Pharisees and townspeople. Someone has said there are three kinds of people in the church: those who do things, those who let them and those who criticize them for it. Well, this first group is the "let them" group. Now, this group is willing to come to the dinner given for Jesus--after all, Simon is paying for it. The disciples have left all to follow Jesus, and they are willing for that to happen, too. They will not complain as long as they do not have to bear any burden of commitment.

Do you know people like that? I do. I see them drive up on Sunday to let their children out for Sunday School. They are willing for their children to come, to enjoy the building and facilities, for others to teach them, provided they don't have to share in the cost or burden. But you won't find their name on a pledge card, or a teachers list, or an ushers roll.

The second group of people is made up of those who are the disciples. Now, ordinarily, we think of the disciples as persons who have abandoned all to follow Jesus. But had they really done that at this stage? I think not. For example, after the crucifixion of Jesus, we are told that the disciples went fishing. Where did they get the boat? Maybe Peter had just dry docked it temporarily! And they were always complaining about things, as though they were terribly concerned about their rights and the cost of things. At this point in their lives, we would have to call them the "don't over do it crowd." I suppose the best illustration would be when they fled from the scene of the cross or when they hid out and the Bible says they locked and barred the door. Or maybe a good example would be Peter denying Jesus that terrible night. Yes, the "don't over do it crowd!"

Do you know, sometimes I suspect I belong to that crowd. Do you? We are willing to work and serve in the church. We attend worship, we go to Sunday School, we give, we work, we become officers--yet there are so many reservations to our commitment. What reservations do you have on your commitment this morning. Is there a reservation on your financial commitment?

So here are two groups--the "let them" group; and the "don't over do it group." But then there was a third person at the dinner that night. It is the woman who puts all she has into doing something special and beautiful for Jesus. She didn't count the cost. Her heart told her to express her love for Jesus and she did the nicest thing she knew to do. She didn't let someone else do it, she didn't hold any reservations about it, she just did all she knew to do. And, do you know, when she did, the Bible says two things about her. First, in the words of Jesus, the Bible says, "she has done a beautiful thing." And second, the Bible, again in the words of Jesus, says, "she had done what she could." Wouldn't you like for Jesus to say that about you and your life? I know I would! What a thrill it would be to hear him say of my life, of my commitment, of my dedication, "Andy has one a beautiful thing to me." And, "he had done what he could."

The phrase, "she had done what she could" leads us into the second scripture we read this morning about the little boy who went out to hear Jesus and carried his sack lunch. When evening approached and the people were hungry, there was no place to go to get food. Besides, the disciples said there was no money for that kind of expense. So there was this great multitude with their need and the only food available was the sack lunch of a little boy who was brown bagging it with Jesus.

How did the disciples know the little lad was there with his five little loaves and his two little fish? Maybe he was standing by when Jesus asked the disciples how they would feed the multitude. And maybe he came over and timidly tugged at the clothes of one of the disciples--probably Andrew--and offered him what he had. Anyway, the Bible says that Andrew said to Jesus, "There is a lad here who has five barley loaves and two fish; and what are they among so many?" Well, you remember the story. You remember how Jesus had them sit down--about five thousand in all--and he took what the little boy had placed in his hands and he fed the multitude.

Well, as we look at our world with all of its failures, with all of its sins and shortcomings, with all of its needs, we say to ourselves, about who we are and what we can do with what little we have, "What are they among so many." Yes, we feel like that little boy with a sack lunch and five thousand to feed. But what I want to say to you and me this morning is this: if we will take what we have, if we will take who we are and what we are and put it in the hands of Jesus--yes, if we will do what we can--then Jesus will take what we put at his disposal and bless it and use it, and he will minister to the multitudes.

Isn't that exciting? Oh what needs our world has. Oh what needs human lives have. If we gave ourselves--all we have and are--it wouldn't be enough. Yet, if we do what we can, take what we have and put it in the hands of Jesus, he can do a miracle and meet the needs of a dying and lost world.

Well, we are going to make our financial commitment to Jesus and his church for 1979. For your sake I hope you will do what so many in our church are doing and commit a tithe. But far more than that, I hope also that you will commit all that you are, all that you have, to Jesus. I hope you will do a beautiful thing for him, that you will do what you can, that you will take what you have, put it in the hands of Jesus, and see what a miracle he can do in the world today.