

“HEAVEN’S BOUNTY”**Pastor Mike Corwin****THANKSGIVING SUNDAY****TEXT: MARK 6:30-44****GOD’S WORD: 2 KINGS 4:42-44****I – PILGRIMS:**

They landed in this country on December 11, 1620. They were a group of 102 Puritans who had fled England to find relief from the religious persecution they had suffered there. In England they were told how to worship. They sought more freedom in choosing how to glorify God. So after a stop in Holland for a while they boarded a boat called the Mayflower and set foot in this new country at Plymouth Rock.

Landing in the New England states in the beginning of winter was not a good tactical move. They were ill prepared for the harsh winter and before summer had lost 46 members to the harsh conditions. But they were a religious people. They still worshipped God and they prayed. They didn’t get back on the boat and leave; they stayed and trusted God to provide for them. After the winter the local Indians taught them the proper way to garden and introduced them to a thing called corn. They learned well and had a bountiful harvest and had become good hunters too. There was plenty of meat and vegetables to go around. So they did what every good church group would do, they had a potluck!

After that first harvest in the autumn of 1621 Governor William Bradford proclaimed a day of thanksgiving and prayer to God. They were in need and God had provided for them so it was only right that they honored God and gave him thanks for doing so. So they gathered together with their Indian friends and threw a feast that lasted 3 days. This tradition has carried on through the years and has become a national holiday where we are to recognize the blessings God has given us.

II – ALWAYS ENOUGH:

The celebration of our blessings once a year is a wonderful tradition. I thank the pilgrims for starting it. We should pause not just on Thanksgiving Day to thank God, but make it a continuous practice in our life. But there’s something else going on here that I want us to take note of and think about this morning. That is that we are supposed to share Heaven’s bounty with those in need.

The Indians had lived there for hundreds of years. They had plenty of food and could take care of themselves. They had no need to be nice to these white men. The ones who had come before them had slaughtered some of the Indians and sent others to England to be slaves. Yet they knew that what they had did not come from themselves, but the Great Spirit. Everything had come from the one who had created the earth and then populated it with plants and animals. They had a great reverence for this being we call God and considered everything they had to have come from him. They owned nothing; God owned everything and just shared it with them. Therefore they were to share it with others. So when they saw these new people in need, saw them dying and starving, they shared what God had given them with these newcomers. There was enough to go around.

This theme of enough to go around can be found in many places in the Bible. The story you heard Becky read this morning is one such example. Elisha was the prophet who followed Elijah and was the one who talked to Israel and its people on behalf of God. He was staying now in Gilgal where a famine was keeping people from eating as they should. One day he was honored by the people by having a sack of grain and some bread brought to him. But instead of hoarding it for himself he had it fed to the 100 people who were staying with him. When the servant balked at the fact it wasn't enough Elisha told him when it comes to heaven's bounty there is plenty for all.

III – TEXT – MARK 6:30-44:

This is a lesson that Jesus himself taught his followers/disciples in the familiar story of feeding the 5,000. Listen to it again with this in mind...

Mark 6:30 - 44 (NLT)

³⁰The apostles returned to Jesus from their ministry tour and told him all they had done and taught. ³¹Then Jesus said, **“Let’s go off by ourselves to a quiet place and rest awhile.”** He said this because there were so many people coming and going that Jesus and his apostles didn’t even have time to eat. ³²So they left by boat for a quiet place, where they could be alone. ³³But many people recognized them and saw them leaving, and people from many towns ran ahead along the shore and got there ahead of them. ³⁴Jesus saw the huge crowd as he stepped from the boat, and he had compassion on them because they were like sheep without a shepherd. So he began teaching them many things. ³⁵Late in the afternoon his disciples came to him and said, “This is a remote place, and it’s already getting late. ³⁶Send the crowds away so they can go to the nearby farms and villages and buy something to eat.” ³⁷But Jesus said, **“You feed them.”** “With what?” they asked. “We’d have to work for months to earn enough money to buy food for all these people!” ³⁸**“How much bread do you have?”** he asked. **“Go and find out.”** They came back and reported, “We have five loaves of bread and two fish.” ³⁹Then Jesus told the disciples to have the people sit down in groups on the green grass. ⁴⁰So they sat down in groups of fifty or a hundred. ⁴¹Jesus took the five loaves and two fish, looked up toward heaven, and blessed them. Then, breaking the loaves into pieces, he

kept giving the bread to the disciples so they could distribute it to the people. He also divided the fish for everyone to share. ⁴²They all ate as much as they wanted, ⁴³and afterward, the disciples picked up twelve baskets of leftover bread and fish. ⁴⁴A total of 5,000 men and their families were fed from those loaves!

Jesus had sent the disciples out with the power to preach repentance, drive out demons, and to heal the sick. Exhausting work! So when they got back he decided they should take a little Sabbatical and get away, but they were unable to escape the crowd who had been following, watching, and learning. They had a need to know about who Jesus was and what he came to do. They wanted more of his message of Salvation. It says that he saw their needs, saw they were lost and seeking God, and he had compassion on them. So he cancelled his day off and stayed there preaching and teaching so they could hear and understand the Good News.

Jesus wasn't the only one who had compassion on the people, his disciples did too. They saw that night was coming and knew these people had walked completely around the lake to be with Jesus and them. They knew they had not eaten and they were in a remote area. There was no 7-11 on the next camel trail. McDonalds did not have a lakeside location. They had nothing to eat and no where to get fed. So they tell Jesus the people need food and he should send them on their way so they can get someplace safe to eat and sleep.

But Jesus has another idea. Jesus says – “You Feed Them.” They tell him that not only isn't there any place to get them food, but even if there was they would have to work for months in order to buy enough. Jesus then tells them to take inventory and they bring him 5 loaves of bread and 2 fish. Hardly enough to feed 5,000 men plus their wives and children. But Jesus has them seat the people in groups, blesses the food, and then starts dishing it out. By the time he's done everyone has eaten to satisfaction and there is more leftovers than what they originally started with.

Jesus wasn't only feeding the people; he was teaching his disciples a valuable lesson. There was something more critical for these men to learn than providing food for hungry stomachs, these men who were about to be the core group of the new church. He was showing them that when it comes to the bounty of heaven and the needs of others, there is always enough. Everyone had their needs met and were satisfied by what Jesus provided.

IV – HEAVEN'S BOUNTY AT BUCYRUS:

I believe that we are seeing this same lesson played out here at Bucyrus United Methodist Church. That when it comes to others in need there is always enough of Heaven's Bounty provided.

If you look at your bulletin each week you will see a financial accounting of the Sunday giving of this church. It has amazed me and I have thanked God often that no matter what, even with Covid and closing the church. Even with the present inflation and other unrest in our country,

we have never failed to raise enough funds to meet our budget. We've had to cancel or postpone ministries due to lack of volunteers, but never due to lack of finances. Our clothing and food pantry is always stocked to the point we share with other organizations. The back to school ministry never falls short of blessing the children in need. When hurricanes or other disasters occur you all are quick to respond to the needs as you help UMCOR do the ministry of meeting the needs of those affected. Farmer to Farmer blesses those in Liberia where we have ministered, and once again our Christmas Eve offering will leave the church and bless those at our sister church – St. John's UMC in Liberia. When you were told that the money for free lunches dried up in the federal budget you have responded to all three of our local schools so no child goes hungry. This is on top of the funds raised during Bible School for the backpack program.

So why is God blessing us? The answer is because we've changed our philosophy. In the years past we've been worried about taking care of ourselves. We are blessed because now we've become concerned with taking care of others. I've proclaimed to you often that we need to claim the city of Bucyrus for Jesus Christ. We can do this when we stop playing church and become the church. God is blessing us because we are meeting the needs of others so God is giving us the bounty of heaven to do it. As long as we're meeting the needs of others there will always be enough.

V – SHARING THE BOUNTY:

Compared to the grand scheme of things, what little money we have extra really isn't that much. Compared to some it is only 5 loaves of bread and a couple of fish. But when we're doing the work Jesus calls us to do, it will be blessed and divided to meet the needs of others. I think we have only scratched the surface so far. I think we will see more bounty and more people as we continue to work towards claiming the city and sharing the love of Jesus with everyone. I see enough bounty coming in to do things we haven't even considered yet. To continue developing programs to feed, cloth, and house those in need, and my dreams go on and on. I hope yours do too.

All we have is from God and like the Indians did we need to realize it and share it with those in need. We need to remember that when it comes to the needs of others there is always enough Heavenly bounty to go around, and that everyone can have their needs met and be satisfied by what Jesus provides – love and grace. When we do this the whole city will eventually join us in giving thanks to God and the party will last not just three days, but for eternity!

AMEN