

Sermon for July 25, 2021
9th Sunday after Pentecost (Proper 12)
The Rev. Canon Raymond Raney
Trinity on the Hill Episcopal Church
Los Alamos, New Mexico

2 Samuel 11:1-15
Psalm 14
Ephesians 3:14-21
John 6:1-21

I have a question: What can one person do?
What was the Chinese curse? May you live in interesting times. These are interesting times, indeed.

It was perplexing enough before last year, and after Covid hit, the perplexity was overwhelming.

I had the habit of leaving the cable news on all the time. Talk about anxiety producing stimuli.

After Covid hit, we did something to reduce the anxiety: We cancelled our Direct TV, and turned to streaming for entertainment. We also limited our intake of the news to the PBS Newshour – once a day.

And lately we have begun watching the news the following morning to give us the day to digest what happened the day before, and not have to go to bed concerned about what we'd seen on the news.

But even at that the news of Covid and the variants of the virus is perplexing. So perplexing that when I learned about my possible exposure this week, I was out of sorts. What do I do?

Fortunately, yesterday, my wife sought advice from the health committee at the church where she works, which includes a state epidemiologist, and we took a Covid Self-test they recommended. I was relieved the tests were negative. I'm still having a full medical test Monday, and out of an abundance of caution I'm wearing a mask and gloves today.

When I learned of my exposure I started contacting everyone I'd been around since Tuesday. It's scary how many people one person can touch. If I wondered about what one person could do, this was evidence – a lot.

What can one person do? That reminds me of today's Gospel.

The Gospel today is John's telling of the Feeding of the 5,000.

“When Jesus looked up and saw a large crowd coming toward him, Jesus said to Philip, ‘Where are we to buy bread for these people to eat?’ He said this to test him, for he himself knew what he was going to do. Philip answered him, ‘Six months' wages would not buy enough bread for each of them to get a little.’ One of his disciples, Andrew, Simon Peter's brother, said to him, “There is a boy here who has five barley loaves and two fish. But what are they among so many people?” Jesus said, ‘Make the people sit down.’ Now there was a great deal of grass in the place; so they sat down, about five thousand in all. Then Jesus took the loaves, and when he had given thanks, he distributed them to those who were seated; so also the fish, as much as they wanted. When they were satisfied, he told his disciples, ‘Gather up the fragments left over, so that nothing may be lost.’ So they gathered them up, and from the fragments of the five barley loaves, left by those who had eaten, they filled twelve baskets.”

Do you remember, those of you who are old enough to have gone to school before the incorporated school lunch programs, when your mother made your lunch for you? I had a Roy Rogers lunch box. I knew that lunch box was great. Maybe peanut butter and jelly. Maybe she added a little extra treat: some Fritos, or a Twinkie, or a Baby Ruth. But I knew the loving care she put into packing that lunch. And you knew your lunch was packed with all the love she could put into it. And God be with anyone who tried to take it from you.

That was the care that went into the boy's lunch that he offered to Andrew when it looked like there was no food to be found anywhere.

Maybe he thought that at least Jesus could have something to eat, after all he'd been teaching the crowd all day long, and he had to be hungry.

But the offering of the five barley loaves and three fish was made more than a simple lunch. It was a feast, a feast that we celebrate today in the Eucharist.

What can one person do?

This event in John, the feeding of the 5,000, is where Jesus institutes the Eucharist as a meal to be shared by everyone to note the gift God has given the world in creation. In John the Eucharist does not come at the end of Jesus' life, as in the other Gospels, but Eucharist is made in the midst of Jesus' life. And we are called to accept the gift, and to give back as much as we are given.

But we ask ourselves: What can one person do?

In 1946 a woman named Agnes Gonxha Bojaxhiu was called to serve as a nun in Calcutta, India. She had no resources, but she felt called to care for the poorest of the poor. She and 13 of her sister nuns began working to care for those no one cared for.

They became the Missionaries of Charity, and today thousands of them care for the poor worldwide in the shadow of Mother Teresa.

What can one person do?

In 1976 Millard and Linda Fuller returned to San Antonio, Texas, from a mission trip to Zaire where they had worked on setting up communities for the poor to provide housing for those who had no shelter.

In San Antonio they were asked to help out with the poor neighborhood. They recruited volunteers and built homes. They created Habitat for Humanity that has become Habitat International. Homes are built in the U.S. and all around the world to house the homeless.

And folks from Trinity on the Hill have built numerous homes for families in El Paso. Ask those families what can be done.

What can one person do?

We are all called to work in the name of Jesus Christ to make the world a better place. We are called to do what we can, where we can, when we can to feed the hungry, clothe the naked, house the homeless. We don't know when our efforts will be called upon, but we do know that God will provide the resources when it happens.

We work together so that we each never ask ourselves: what can one person do?

Speaking of one person: I give you St. Paul, who probably did more to spread the teachings of Jesus far and wide in the ancient world. So I leave you with the words from the Epistle to the Ephesians:

“I bow my knees before the Father, from whom every family in heaven and on earth takes its name. I pray that, according to the riches of his glory, he may grant that you may be strengthened in your inner being with power through his Spirit, and that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith, as you are being rooted and grounded in love. I pray that you may have the power to comprehend, with all the saints, what is the breadth and length and height and depth, and to know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge, so that you may be filled with all the fullness of God.

“Now to him who by the power at work within us is able to accomplish abundantly far more than all we can ask or imagine, to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus to all generations, forever and ever. Amen.”