



Lakeside Sermons

Lakeside Baptist Church • Rocky Mount, North Carolina
Jody C. Wright, Senior Minister

JULY 22, 2012
THE EIGHTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

Lookers and Seers
Psalm 104; Mark 6:30-46

The other night on an episode of Exploring North Carolina titled “Life at the Top,” host Tom Earnhardt began the program by commenting that one of the things his father often told him as he was growing up was that some people are lookers and others are seers. Mr. Earnhardt used that memory to illustrate how some of us walk into a forest and look at nothing but trees—tall, bulky things with branches and leaves, flowers and fruit. Other people, he said, walk into a forest and see not only the trees but also the phenomenal bio-diversity that exists in those trees. The subject of that program was the immensity of life—birds, animals, and insects—that live in the canopy of our forests. It was an eye-opening program.

Some people are lookers and others are seers. That bit of wisdom got me thinking, not only about trees, but about the story I just read. Next to the stories about “The Good Samaritan” and “The Prodigal Son,” I expect that the “Feeding of the Five Thousand” is one of the best-known stories in the New Testament.

It is, of course, the perfect story to illustrate the importance of sharing. All four Gospels tell the story and it is the Gospel of John that offers the fact that it was a young boy who provided the five loaves and two fish (John 6:9). As we blend those various accounts together we learn that the unselfish generosity of a boy coupled with the miraculous power of Jesus fed five thousand men (and the many more thousands of women and children who accompanied them) with twelve baskets of food left over. Who can hear that story and not recognize that our gifts, though they may seem small, can do great work in the kingdom of God?

But Tom Earnhardt got me thinking about that parable in a different light. Listen again to the way Mark begins the story:

When it grew late, his disciples came to him and said, “This is a deserted place, and the hour is now very late; send them away so that they may go into the surrounding country and villages and buy something for themselves to eat.” But he

answered them, "You give them something to eat." They said to him, "Are we to go and buy two hundred denarii worth of bread, and give it to them to eat?" And he said to them, "How many loaves have you? Go and see." When they had found out, they said, "Five, and two fish."

I imagine the disciples grumbling to one another as they turned away from Jesus when he told them to go see how much bread there was. I can't blame them. As the day wore on, the disciples realized they had two problems: one—they were tired from their recent missionary journeys and the long day on the water and the hillside and, two—these thousands of people were getting hungry but Jesus did not seem to be winding down. They thought it was time to call it a day and send everybody home. They went to Jesus and suggested he offer the benediction. Yet, instead of agreeing with them, Jesus told them to see what food they had on hand.

They were tired. They were hungry. They were frustrated that they were supposed to figure out how to feed a multitude of people with, well . . . nothing! Someone calculated that it would probably take over a half year's wages to pay for such a meal! Off they went looking and I cannot help but wonder if they saw the boy with the five loaves and two fish and had an idea. Surely if they went back to Jesus with such a paltry amount of food he would see the absurdity of his request and agree to send the people away. I suspect they returned to Jesus looking very disappointed, held out the little lunch, and said, "Look, all we found was five loaves and two fish. Too bad there isn't any more!"

The disciples were lookers but they were not seers. Jesus had told them to go and see what food was to be had, but they went looking for enough food to feed ten or fifteen thousand people or more. He wanted them to see what was out there in the crowd. They were looking for a catering truck!

For me the miracle is the picnic which followed. Like the small boy with his bread and fish, I suspect other people were prepared for the day. I do not doubt for a moment that Jesus could have taken the bread and fish in his hands, blessed it, and somehow the food kept multiplying as it was passed around. Maybe it happened that way which is truly miraculous. Yet, I think it is even more miraculous for Jesus to have inspired the generosity of so many thousands of people to sit down together, open their sacks, and share whatever food they had with them. The miracle was probably two-fold as

generosity and community unfolded on that hillside. Surely strangers became friends and acquaintances got to know one another better. Who knows, a few bruised feelings might have been soothed and rifts between neighbors or family members might have been mended. One thing is certain, thousands of people eventually left that hillside completely filled—physically, emotionally, and spiritually. That is miraculous!

The disciples looked without seeing. They looked for a way to provide food for so many thousands of people. Nowhere short of King Herod's palace could ever accommodate a crowd that size for a regular meal. They didn't look very far and tried to fool Jesus by saying that the best they could do was five loaves and two fish, barely enough for a couple of them not to mention the multitude surrounding them. Jesus would not be fooled. He wanted them to see not simply to look. He took their little lunch and showed them what the power of God could do with a multitude of small gifts.

Some people are lookers and others are seers. We look around this community and recognize its many needs. We look at the work the Salvation Army does, the food that Meals on Wheels delivers, the beds that the homeless shelter provides, the books distributed by the library, the backpacks filled with food that help children eat healthy over the weekend, the radio reading services offered for the blind, the counseling and medical care and educational opportunities provided for people who cannot afford them. We look at all these terrific programs and wonder how in the world they can all be funded. How can we keep everything going? Thank goodness other people see a different picture. By pulling together a huge number of our non-profits, by calling on the community to support the good work being done here, and by creating a fun and meaningful event for us all, the Reach Out Rocky Mount Fun Run for Charities raised over \$529,000 for local charities this spring. Over the past four years, in excess of \$1.7 million has been raised to benefit our community. Awareness of our non-profit programs has been increased. New partnerships have been created. A new generation of community leaders has been cultivated. That would not have happened if someone had simply dropped a check for a couple of million dollars into our community. Some people are lookers and others are seers.

Some people look at downtown Rocky Mount, remember the glory days when it was bustling with commerce and activity, but shake their heads at the dilapidated buildings and empty storefronts. Other people, however, see a revitalized downtown area with new streets and sidewalks, renovated buildings, and shops and businesses that will lure us all back to the train

tracks that have threatened for years to divide us. Some people are lookers and others are seers.

Some people look at neighborhoods which once stood proud and pristine and grimace at the homes which are deteriorating and the illegal activities that are destroying those communities. Two weeks ago, over 150 people saw houses which needed loving care. They saw what new wood, fresh paint, and hard work could do to restore a home and improve a neighborhood. On the street where my crew worked, I noticed a neighbor start scraping and repairing her own house when she saw what our kids were doing across the street. Some people are lookers and others are seers.

Don't just look around. See what is to be seen. Pay attention to what is going on. Notice the abundance of gifts that are around you. See the potential that is within you. See what God has made available for us.

Jesus' disciples had a vision problem. They looked at the problems they encountered, but they could not always see the resources and solutions that were right in front of them or within them. Most of us have the same problem. We get stymied by the enormity of a challenge and fail to remember that God has called us to meet it. We look at the immensity of a problem but fail to see the abundance of resources God provides for us.

Last week I ran across a story attributed to Booker T. Washington the African American educator and author who was also an advisor to presidents. Apparently he enjoyed telling this story often, and for good reason:

A ship, lost at sea in the Atlantic Ocean along the northern coast of South America for many days, suddenly sighted a friendly vessel. From the mast of the unfortunate vessel came the signals: "Water, water. We die of thirst." The answer from the friendly vessel came back at once: "Cast down your bucket where you are." A second time, the signal: "Water, send us water!" from the distressed vessel. And was answered again: "Cast down your bucket where you are." A third and fourth signal for water was again answered: "Cast down your bucket where you are." The captain of the distressed vessel, at last heeding the injunction, cast down his bucket. It came up full of fresh, sparkling water

from the mouth of the Amazon River, which extends miles out into the ocean in what is called the "River Sea."¹

Too often, I think, we look to God for the dramatic miracle. We want flash and fire and smoke then the answer to our problem. We imagine that Jesus held the bread and fish in his hands, looked to heaven, blessed the food, and shazam – bread and fish appeared everywhere in the crowd. We expect Hollywood designed miracles that shock and awe us and are never quite ready to see the little miracles God has already created which surround us day by day.

Psalm 104 is a psalm praising God the Creator. It sings of the multitude of ways God so carefully created the world and prepared for its many needs. God established the world on a sturdy foundation and filled it with all the things needed for life. Birds and animals and fish of all sorts were provided with food and water. Humans were also provided everything necessary for survival as well as for the comforts and joys of life. Have we not experienced all the little gifts God has provided for us? Throughout human history, has anything been needed that God has not provided? Look around and see what God has already created for us. See the miracles at the very tips of your fingers. Cast your bucket down where you are and draw up the miraculous abundance of God!

Imagine in first century Palestine the absurdity of talking about a church, a fellowship of believers, who gather in a beautiful edifice, sing hymns of praise to the accompaniment of a magnificent pipe organ, and go out into the world to witness to Christ in so many different ways? Imagine talking about special programs for children, guiding youth as they grow into adulthood, and teaching adults about the meaning and impact of scripture (Much of which did not even exist at that time!). Imagine discussing the kinds of ministries we support with a first century carpenter who used crude tools to fashion tables and benches and carts. Every one of the people on that hillside with Jesus would shake their heads at the impossibility of any of these things given what they looked around and saw in that day and time. Everyone would shake their heads but one for Jesus knew that God had placed the vision and ingenuity of such dreams in the minds and hearts of his people and provided all the needed resources throughout the earth. And it has come to pass. Cast your bucket down where you are and draw up the miracles of God.

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A multitude of people still surround us. They are tired and hungry and anxious and in need. Jesus tells us to go and see what is available. Do not look at the enormity of the needs, but see the miracle of resources God has placed around us and within us. See the power of God at work in us and in the world. Cast your bucket down where you are and draw up the miracles of God provided for the blessing of this world. See the resources within yourself and the ways in which God wants to use you to bring about miracles here and throughout the world. Do not look but see what God has already done!

July 22, 2012

Prayer of Thanksgiving and Intercession

Although we know very little about sheep or shepherding, we are grateful to call you our Shepherd, O God. We know that you protect us and provide for us. We know that you have our welfare at heart and come after us when we are in danger. We know that all of the good in the world comes from your generous hand while with your protective hand you seek to keep at bay all of the evil that threatens us.

For the change of pace, the refreshment of summer activities, the rest and renewal of time away with family and friends, we are grateful. We discover when we take time for ourselves that not only are our bodies rejuvenated but our souls are refreshed as well. We thank you for these gifts, O God, and for leading us to take care of ourselves.

We ask your blessing upon our young people who are away on pilgrimage, seeking to find the right path to grow in their faith. Use their experiences, conversations, and questions about faith to enable them to see and experience you as never before. Bring them back safely, we pray, not only in body but in spirit as well.

For all of us who walk through valleys of deep darkness, we pray for a keen awareness of your presence. Keep us confident in your protection, assured of your guidance, and aware of the comfort that you alone can offer. Today we are mindful of the victims, their families, and the entire community of Aurora, Colorado. We also grieve for the families of all those who died in the ferry accident in Tanzania. For friends who are ill, for loved ones who suffer, for anyone who faces daily the uncertainty of life, we pray. Guide us as we make important choices in life and remind us always of the need for love to be our guide. Bring us safely to the other side of whatever chasm threatens us and hold onto us so that we will not stumble or fall.

Bless us, O Lord, until our lives are overflowing with your grace and goodness. Then open our hands and hearts to be just as generous with one another. Grant us your Spirit each and every day of life so that we might bring honor to you and witness to your redemptive love. All these things we offer in the name of Christ who is our King of Love. Amen.



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