



Lakeside Sermons

Lakeside Baptist Church • Rocky Mount, North Carolina
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NOVEMBER 16, 2014
THE TWENTY-THIRD SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST
THE GENEROUS COMMUNITY

A Church with No Needs Exodus 16:9-18; Mark 6:30-44

Once upon a time there were two churches which sat diagonally from one another on opposite sides of the street. For many years, both churches had been part of the fabric of the city that had grown up around them. Each one included a diverse group of believers: young and old, longtime members and others who had recently joined, women and men who came from a variety of religious traditions. Their members were homemakers, service providers, clerks, civic and business leaders, musicians, artists, educators, medical providers, manufacturers, students, and retirees. Forty and fifty years ago, both congregations were full every Sunday morning and Wednesday evening. Building and parking lot expansions were necessary to accommodate the growth that naturally occurred. Programs blossomed, ministry expanded, and the two congregations ministered in important ways to the growing city.

Age, a fickle economy, and the proliferation of alternative activities on weekends changed the look of the congregations on Sunday mornings. Faces familiar for decades no longer appeared in the pews. Gray hair was in the majority and though there were numerous young families in both churches, travel and sports and family activities tugged them in different directions so that rarely were they all in worship at the same time. Upkeep of aging buildings and the rising cost of programs and staff were a constant challenge for both congregations as they struggled to continue their ministries.

The church on the eastern corner realized that if it were going to survive, the congregation needed to be aware of its needs. Specially appointed committees studied the property, programming, and staff needs. Careful attention was given to the needs of each age group and any special groups within the congregation in regards to classroom and other building usage. The need for leaders, teachers, and committees was spelled out carefully. A proactive plan to address anticipated building issues was developed and outlined over a ten year period. The church budget was trimmed as much as possible and the financial needs of the congregation were spelled out in letters with charts and diagrams to help everyone understand the needs of the church on the eastern corner.

Nothing much seemed to change, however. Each year felt like a struggle even though many good things were happening. The church was able to keep its facilities in good repair and even make a few improvements, of which it was very proud. The budgets were practical and lean and ambitious, but seldom were they ever met, though expenses were always paid. Maintaining ministry became a

constant challenge and every communication spelled out the obvious needs of the church, especially the need for members to give more money. Many good things took place at the church, but it was obvious the people felt weary and uninspired.

The church on the western corner had the same challenges. Their members felt the sting of recessions and the pain of layoffs. Their families juggled church along with job responsibilities and family needs. Older members were no longer able to volunteer as they once did and younger people felt stretched between civic and family duties. The buildings, much the same age as the other church, faced the same ongoing needs and repairs. Their budget, too, stretched thin between growing expenses and changing patterns of giving.

Yet, the church on the western corner seemed to thrive. The members talked about needs, but not about church needs. They discussed the needs of members of the congregation who were exploring their faith as young people, testing their faith against the challenges of life as adults, and relying upon their faith more and more as elders. They talked about the needs of families of all shapes and sizes. They talked with people in the church who had particular needs that did not seem to be met anywhere else.

Leaders worked hard to determine needs within the community and ways in which the congregation could help meet those needs. Members of the church prayed about needs around the world that they could never directly affect but trusted that God could. Missions groups of all ages asked for guidance to recognize needs they had overlooked and for resources that were underutilized.

The church on the western corner felt less like an institution with bills to pay and more like a movement that was attempting to change the world. While it was certainly a family of faith, it was a family with arms open wide, eager to welcome any and all who were looking for help and hope. Although it was fiscally responsible, the congregation never let the bottom line guide the vision of ministry which God had planted in their hearts.

Once upon a time there was a church that had many needs and there was a church which had no needs, but ministered to people with many needs. Which church is Lakeside? Which church should we be?

Last week we explored God's generosity and discovered that it is endlessly abundant and eternally surprising. We saw that God provides for our needs even before they occur and responds to any needs that suddenly arise. Earlier we heard the Israelites complain as they marched through the desert with few options for food. They daydreamed about the stews they used to cook over the fires outside their hovels in Egypt and longed to have full stomachs again even if it meant a return to slavery. God listened. The next morning when the Hebrews looked out of their tents they saw the ground covered in something white. "What is it?" they asked, and the

word “manna” was born. It was manna which could be made into bread each morning. In the evenings, quail covered the ground and provided nutrition for the night. The people had a need and God met it.

After a long day of travel and teaching, Jesus’ disciples came to him to remind him that it was getting late and the crowd that had come to hear him needed to leave in order to find something to eat and be on their way. What we don’t hear is their complaint that they are tired and hungry and want those folks to leave. Jesus, however, told them to figure out a way to feed the thousands of people who were scattered across the hillside. Not schooled in the business of event planning and catering, the disciples complained that there was no where to buy that much food and besides it would be too expensive to feed so many people. Jesus asked them to find out how much bread was available to them at that moment. In an attempt at what seems to me to be sarcasm, one of the disciples handed Jesus five loaves and two fish. Jesus must have smiled and then he blessed the food and told the disciples to divide it among the people. Scripture tells us in several places that on that day more than five thousand people ate until they were filled and twelve baskets of leftovers were gathered up.

Jesus and his disciples had no particular needs that day other than to rest. The people who followed them, however, were in need of compassion and instruction and hope. Jesus supplied those gifts in abundance. After a long journey and a day of listening and talking, they were also hungry and tired. Jesus and the disciples managed to find the resources to meet those needs. However you explain the miracle, thousands of people were fed because God caused the resources to be available.

It is sometimes difficult for us to step outside of ourselves and our particular concerns to pay attention to the needs of others. Over and over during their journey with Jesus, the disciples discovered daunting needs and a staggering abundance of provision. Their experience with Jesus reminds me of the minister who stood up before the congregation one Sunday and said, “I have good news and I have bad news. The good news is that we have more than enough money to fund all of our ministries. The bad news is that it is still in our pockets.”

This morning, I have good news. Lakeside Baptist Church has no needs.¹ We have no needs. This congregation consists of its people and the Spirit of Christ which unites us. We are not these buildings or programs or property or plans. We are people called by God to respond with compassion to the needs of people. We are called to meet the spiritual needs of people who are seeking God and trying to understand how faith informs life. We are called to meet the physical needs of

¹The concept of a church with no needs was introduced to me by Ruben Swint during his stewardship workshop titled, “Growing Generous Givers: A Stewardship Conference for Ministers and Lay Leaders,” held on September 19, 2014, Wake Forest Baptist Church, Wake Forest, North Carolina.

people so that no one experiences hunger or homelessness or illness without medical care. We are called to meet the emotional needs of people so that no one feels alone, no one struggles alone, and no one grieves alone. Years ago I heard a missionary describe our calling in this way: "Wherever there is a need and a Christian, there is a mission field." If I am not mistaken, right here and now, there are about two hundred mission fields ready for action.

Lakeside has no needs, but we have a calling. And we have resources. The children around us need care and instruction in who God is and why God loves us all. Our young people need guidance and opportunities to explore their faith without ridicule or condemnation. Our adults need support in sorting out the ways in which our faith influences our daily lives. They need support while caring for children and parents, balancing work and family, and continuing to discern God's call for their lives. Our more mature adults need affirmation and encouragement as they rely more and more on their faith in their later years.

Lakeside has no needs, but we live in a community screaming in pain, crying for help, begging for answers. We live in a community where people need food and shelter and clothing. They need medical care and mental health care and education and jobs. Our community needs help getting along with one another, treating each other with respect, and working together to solve our problems instead of working against one another and creating new problems. Our community needs to find ways to stop violence in its varied forms and restore a sense of value to individual lives. Our community has tremendous needs. And we have the resources.

Nearly sixty years ago, a group of people prompted by the Spirit of God, realized the need for a new ministry in our community and Lakeside was called into being. There was a need for a space to worship, for people to study scripture, for fellowship to take place, and for ministry to begin.

The beautiful buildings that we enjoy are a response to the needs of people. Our children are taught God's love here. Our young people are prepared to go out into the world to live out their faith. Adults are given encouragement and support and inspiration to live out God's calling in their lives. We continue to maintain and operate these buildings because they meet needs. Listen to a partial list of some of the ways our buildings minister in this community. Two garden clubs meet here, each dedicated to bringing greater beauty to the world. Teen Court and the Resolve It Together programs use our space to help young people and families learn how to handle their problems without violence or breaking the law. Our school system and the Down East Partnership hold parenting classes here and music and art students are frequently seen coming and going. We provide space for CareNet Counseling and the Meals-on-Wheels office. Non-profit boards often meet here and smaller churches ask to use our fellowship hall for banquets and other events. Community Hospice held their annual memorial service here last Wednesday as they have done for a number of years. The Community Christmas Chorus rehearses here and Al-

Anon offers a weekly meeting in our facilities. For over thirty years, young children have explored the world of learning in our Preschool.

You know the many needs we meet through Lakeside Involved, which is only one day of ministry. Year round we support United Community Ministries which helps adults and children stabilize their lives through housing and jobs and education. We provide food through Meals on Wheels and emergency assistance to families in crisis. We minister to men and women in prison, to people trying to overcome addictions and re-enter society, to people have medical needs but no insurance, to people who are trying to escape abuse and find some normalcy in life. We repair homes that are unsafe when the owners are unable to afford those improvements. Through our relationships with the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship and Alliance of Baptists, we educate young men and women for ministry, support homes for children, the elderly, and those with developmental disabilities. We assist during disaster relief and support missionaries throughout this country and the world. There are a multitude of needs all around us, and it is our calling to meet those needs.

We do not have a budget for 2015 but we do have a spending plan for our ministry. We won't focus on needs that we do not really have; instead, we will direct our energies to the needs of the people around us. The good news is that we have a phenomenal ministry plan with room to grow. The other good news is that we have the resources to do it all and more. Our calling is to share those resources whether they be money or time or talents or something else. The bread is in Jesus' hands being blessed and broken. And all will be filled.

Once upon a time there were many churches. Some thought they had tremendous needs. Lakeside decided that it would meet the needs of people—and that has made all the difference. Amen.

November 16, 2014

Prayer of Thanksgiving and Supplication

O God who crafted us from the dust of the earth, molded us into your own divine image, and built our lives upon your infinite wisdom and amazing grace, our songs and prayers, our confessions and praises are but feeble attempts at acknowledging our need for you and our gratitude for your never-failing mercies. Too often we look around our world—to money or status, to education or accomplishment, to other people or even within ourselves—seeking security and wholeness. In our doubt and anxiety, we fail to recognize that you provide all that we need for the full and abundant life you have promised. But here we are called to acknowledge, Loving God, our utter dependence upon your grace. You call us to welcome you into our lives and to be transformed into the likeness of Christ, humbling ourselves in service and gratitude. You call us to turn to you in faith and it is because you have been faithful to keep your promises to us and to your people for generations, that we can find in you joy that will brighten our weary hearts, peace that will calm our fearful minds, and hope that will sustain our wounded souls. For every good gift which comes from your generous hand, we offer to you our thanks and praise.

This day, we are reminded that because we have received the abundance of your gifts to us, we have been called to be faithful stewards of possessions and talents, of time and energy. Despite our failings and limitations, you have entrusted to us the sacred work of sharing your love and hope in this community and beyond. For those who lack adequate shelter, we are called to build. With those who lack food or clothing or medical care, we are called to share. To those who lack companionship and hope, we are called to be present. Equip and empower us for these tasks, we pray, that we might find the strength and courage to pattern our lives after the example of Christ so that your light and life might be spread to the dark and dying corners of our world. In the name of the One who offers abundant life now and eternal life with you, even Jesus our Lord, we pray. Amen.

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