

Our sermon text today is the “what does this mean?” of the other two lessons for today.

The first lesson – the lesser-known, maybe, but no less miraculous feeding of 100 men by God through the prophet Elisha.

The Gospel lesson – the much better known miraculous feeding of 5000 men and their families from a little boy’s lunch by Jesus.

That middle lesson, sandwiched between the two miraculous meals – what does this mean for us?

God – **the God who is able to bless you abundantly** – to give so much bread and fish that baskets are filled after you’ve had your fill – **God will bless you abundantly so that** (here it is, the what does this mean) **you will abound in every good work... God will enrich you in every way so that you can be generous on every occasion.**

God fed the 100 and the 5000, God has fed and supplied you, God has promised to continue to feed and supply you, **so**, give generously from what you have.

Uh, oh... here comes a sermon about giving generously... Pastor is going to talk about money...

Even if money isn’t your favorite sermon topic, if you think you’ve heard it all before, if you think it doesn’t apply to you, I really hope you stay tuned in because I don’t want you to miss out on something amazing. I don’t want you to miss out on a pretty incredible blessing from God.

Did you know that is what the Bible calls giving generously - that it is a blessing from God? The Bible claims that there is a joy that you can only have if you give generously. There are some things that your faith will never find out about God until you start giving generously.

Let me prove it to you: Jesus once said, **“It is more blessed to give than to receive”** (acts 20:35). He says, “You think it’s good getting stuff. You love it on Christmas morning when the little mountain of boxes all have your name on it. You think getting’s a blessing, you should try giving.”

Paul just a few verses before this in 2 Corinthians 9:6 says, **“Whoever sows generously will also reap generously.”** If you give generously, God promises you will get generously back – God isn’t promising that if you give a generous offering today a check will float down from heaven in an equal or greater amount, but when you give generously you reap things like joy, contentment, and peace.

Solomon, the richest and wisest king in the Old Testament wrote, **“A generous person will prosper; whoever refreshes others will be refreshed.”**

How could I be a good pastor if I didn’t want that for you? To be blessed, to reap generously, to prosper, to be refreshed?

To be honest that is why I’m unafraid of this sermon. I know how some people feel when we talk about money – especially in church, but you don’t need to worry because the goal of this sermon isn’t just about you being more generous, this isn’t because we are behind in our church budget (I didn’t pick these readings today); this isn’t about your pastors getting new wardrobes or better cars; this is about you enjoying the blessings that come with living generously. This is about me and your God wanting you to be blessed, and prosperous, and refreshed.

So, whenever God gives you something: whenever you get a year end bonus, a Christmas gift, a paycheck, an allowance; when you baby sit, when the tax return comes, when you get a raise; whenever God gives you some of his stuff, I want you to know the joy of being generous with that stuff.

It’s that simple... except it’s not that simple...

Maybe you are one of those teenagers looking to go to college, and mom and dad aren’t going to be able to foot the bill and if my google search was correct, the average, in-state, UW school is going to cost you \$18K a year. That’s \$72K that you don’t have sitting around... so give generously? No, I’ve got to save.

Or maybe you are one of those people on the other side of college and you have major school loans, and now you have a car payment, and rent and utilities, and your entry level salary isn’t heavy on the zero’s at the end of each check – and those who are collecting bills couldn’t care less about what you heard in church about giving generously, those bills are due no matter how much you give away, so give generously? No, I need that money to live.

Or maybe you met that special someone and are thinking about a wedding. Did you know that the average wedding in America today costs \$25K? And even if you aren’t planning on spending nearly that much, if you are that college graduate who got engaged to another college graduate, you are deep in debt, you got engaged to someone deep in debt, so you get to combine your debt and then spend thousands more on a wedding to make that combination official... so give generously? No offense pastor, but maybe in a few years...

Or maybe you’ve been divorced and you’ve found out that unlike pastoral counseling, lawyers don’t work for free... maybe you are trying to raise kids, kid’s aren’t cheap: clothing, food, and you want to send them to a Christian school so you add tuition to the taxes you are already paying for a school system you aren’t even using; maybe the teeth aren’t growing in straight... maybe the fridge just quit working or the roof is getting old... maybe you’ve been through bankruptcy... maybe you are being forced into retirement but your finances aren’t where the experts say they should be... maybe you aren’t just flush with cash waiting for some sermon that tells you that you should give more generously.

I get it. It’s not always anger, it’s not disobedience to God’s instructions to give, sometimes we feel frustrated, “Give generously? Pastor, I’d love to! I plan to, but right now I need every last dollar and cent to live and survive.”

If that’s where you are at... I’m glad you are here. If you wrestle with giving generously because life is complicated and hard and expensive, I’m glad you are here because what God says in his Bible about giving is not just bank-statement changing, it is heart transforming.

Did you know that if you search your Bible using a tool like biblegateway.com you will find 2197 passages that mention words like “give, giving, gave, gift”. I perused those passages this last week.

Do you know what I found?

There were a lot of passages like 2 Corinthians 9:11 that said it is good to be generous in our giving – there were a lot of passages that talked about what you and I should give to God and other people, but of those 2197 passages they were in the minority... there were way more passages about something else. Can you guess what I found?

After searching what the Bible has to say about giving I found that our God is... how did Paul put it? **“Able to bless you abundantly, so that in all things at all times, you will have all that you need.”** The vast majority of the times the Bible talks about giving it is not what we give to God, but what he gives to us.

Now, we can't go through all the passages this morning, but I want to emphasize two big things that prove just how true it is that our **God is able to bless you abundantly, so that in all things at all times, you will have all that you need** – two things that can transform your view of God and your own life of generosity.

First: God gives daily bread, like he did through Elisha, and Jesus... Which is an incredible gift.

Have you ever thought about how giving God is in every loaf of bread? Some of you count carbs and calories, and check for gluten, but all dietary restrictions aside, have you ever looked at a loaf of bread and counted the blessings in that one loaf?

If you grew up in church like I did, you might know this truth. I grew up in a church where my pastor made me memorize the Lord's Prayer... you know that one that says, “Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name, your kingdom come, your will be done on earth as it is in heaven, **give us today our daily bread...**” but my pastor didn't just want me to learn the words to this prayer, he wanted me to memorize the classic Lutheran question, “What does this mean?”

500 years ago Martin Luther didn't want people to just regurgitate prayers and commandments, he wanted them to know exactly what they meant. And if you grew up in a church like me you might remember that this part of the Lord's Prayer was the worst. This was the worst memory work that existed in the entire catechism curriculum because Martin Luther wrote this giant run-on sentence about what it means to ask God to give us our daily bread.

Anyone remember that?

“What is meant by daily bread? Daily bread includes everything that we need for our bodily welfare, such as food and drink, clothing and shoes, house and home, land and cattle, money and goods, a godly spouse, godly children, godly workers, godly and faithful leaders, good government, good weather, peace and order, health, a good name, good friends, faithful neighbors, and the like.”

And the like? Like there is a whole bunch of stuff you didn't want to include so you could keep it short Dr. Luther? I'm in grade school and this is the worst. None of the kids could keep it straight. What's the difference between a house and a home? I don't own land or cattle! Why do we have to memorize this?

But do you know what? Years later, I'm so glad I had to memorize that because it makes me realize in every loaf, in every slice – white or whole wheat, buttered or slathered with pb&j – there is so much blessing in this bread.

Just think of that list and realize what God had to give me to hold this bread here today.

He had to give land – good soil where the grain would grow. He had to give good weather – there had to be enough sunny days and rainy days so the wheat would grow. He had to give good and faithful workers – a farmer who would plant the seed and harvest it; someone who would drive the wheat to the bakery; someone who would bake the bread and package it; someone working at the grocery store on the third shift to put it on the shelf. God had to give me money and goods so I could walk down the aisle to buy the loaf. He had to give me good health so I could walk down that aisle. He had to give me clothing and shoes because if you try and walk into a store in your birthday suit they won't sell you the loaf. He had to bless me with good neighbors who wouldn't steal my stuff when I was taking a load of groceries inside. He had to bless me with a home where I could store the bread so the critters wouldn't eat it while I slept. He had to give me good government – some governments hoard all the grain and people starve, but not in ours.

You think Jesus feeding the 5000 is impressive, it is an amazing list of how generous our God is when he gives us each day our daily bread.

Some of you here today struggle with giving generously, and the reason you struggle is not because you don't have enough, it's because you don't know the heart of your God. If you think that all you have is what's in your pockets and your bank account when you give, you are working from a limited income position. But if behind you is a God whose pockets are bottomless, whose love for you is boundless, then you don't have to be afraid, you don't have to have all your ducks in a row and plan for every contingency before you give generously.

And you can get to know this daily bread giving God in such a profound way – in fact, every moment of every day presents you with a chance to remember that God is giving and giving and giving and giving.

Just think about the fact that you are here today? What had to happen for you to be sitting in these pews this morning? How many parts did your body need to function properly to get here? What transportation did you need? What protection, what government providing roads and security? There's a room with air conditioning and music. You have eyes to see with, voices to sing with, ears to hear with. Where did all that come from? God.

So, when giving generously makes you worried or afraid, just hit pause, look behind you and see the God who fed the 5000, the God who has been giving you daily bread in a thousand different ways every day of your life.

And that's not even the best part.... I told you I was going to tell you two things God gives. Daily bread was the first, but not even the best.

The second thing? Our incredibly generous God gives the Bread of Life. That's a nickname Jesus gave himself (actually I happens in the verse right after the feeding of the 5000 – we are going to read what's called the Bread of Life Discourse over the next couple weeks). I don't want to steal too much of the thunder from the coming weeks, but if we are going to talk about generous giving, I can't help but quote Jesus – “It is my Father who **gives** you the true bread from heaven - For the bread of God is the bread that comes down from heaven and **gives** life to the world.”

God gave his Son Jesus so that Jesus could give us life.

To really grasp the generosity of this passage we have to know what the Bible means by the word “life”.

Just like this loaf of bread, the life Jesus gives is a loaded blessing.

Biblically speaking, life is what happens when you are close with God. The Bible says that when you don't know Jesus you are dead in your transgressions, that sin separates you, distances you from your God. To be alive (this gift that Jesus gives), is when you are so close to the Father that you can feel and experience and know and believe in his love and his joy and his peace. Life is when his love starts to overcome and fill your heart and your head bit by bit each day until you see him face to face and one day you are so close that you never feel sad again – that is life.

Think about that, like that loaf of bread... how many blessings did our Jesus have to give us so we could know this life?

Do you know, according to God, what kind of people can be that close to him? Good people.

And when I think about our lives – as much as we would like to think that we are at least a little good by comparison to some other people out there – there is so something so bad in the human heart.

Just think about the way we react to things – how bad it is. It starts when we are kids.

The kid who grows up in a home with a mom and dad who loves him, from the moment he was born he wanted for nothing, he has a roof over his head, a dresser full of clothes, so many toys he can't even count them all and they call him out to dinner – a dinner he didn't buy, plan, or prepare – and he sits down and looks at the main dish and what does he do? He pouts...

And we grow up and that thing in our heart doesn't change too much.

We live in a time where most of us didn't walk to church this morning. We drove in a car where the climate was perfectly tailored to your personal preference. And on the commute through radios and phones we got to listen to music or broadcasts whose quality is unmatched in the history of the world. Then we got stuck behind someone who had the audacity to actually go the speed limit instead of five miles over, or we hit a slowdown surrounded by those orange and white striped barrels and what did we think? How did we feel? Blessed?

We watch the kids play sports. There's your son or daughter and God gave them knees, hands, feet, joints, ligaments, muscles, lungs that breath, brains that function - there you are enjoying a thousand gifts from God and the volunteering-his-time soccer coach doesn't give your kid enough playing time, how do you feel? Or the ref gets 95 calls right but he blows that one, how do you respond?

God gives and he gives and he gives and he gives but unless we have all the gifts, or at least all the gifts we think we should have, what happens in our hearts?

It's toxic... it's bad.

So how is it that people like us could have life – could be close to God?

Because God gives – even to sinful people; even to people who should be distant from him.

Jesus came because God so loved the world that he **gave** his one and only Son. And that Son came and he gave up the riches of heaven and he gave up his life on the cross and because of that he gives us life...

What did Paul say again when he was encouraging generous living? **God is able to bless you abundantly, so that in all things at all times, having all that you need...**

God gives and he gives and he gives and he gives... **so that, having all you need, you will abound in every good work... He enriches you in every way so that you can be generous on every occasion.**

So, tomorrow morning I hope you hear it... beep, beep, beep, beep.

You reach over and smack the snooze on your alarm, but still you hear it... beep, beep, beep, beep.

You grab the clock and rip the plug out of the wall, but still you hear it... beep, beep, beep, beep.

It's not the alarm. Do you know what it is? It's God's dump truck. He's backing it up into your driveway. He's dumping another day's blessings that you couldn't possibly hold or even count.

So what do you say? With this kind of God behind us do you think we can give generously? Even if you're still scared, worried or unconvinced, he's going to keep giving to you – he's that kind of God.

God grant that our hearts would learn each day the joy of giving generously from what our God generously gives us.

Amen.