

“THE JESUS SIGN”

(John 6:4-14)

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**[PROPS NEEDED: (#1) “SIGNS” Testimony Video;
(#2) “SIGNS” Commitment Cards]**

[East Cobb U.M.C.; 11-13-11]

--I--

1. **[BOTH Services]** Read NRSV Text: John 6:4-14 & Pray.
2. **[WATCH “SIGNS” TESTIMONY VIDEO...]**
3. On November 21, 1620, the small transatlantic ship “Mayflower” carrying 103 colonists landed at what is now Cape Cod, Massachusetts to begin a new life in the New World.

A--They arrived just in time for a heavy, hard New England winter to set in -- a winter in which over half of their number died through disease and starvation.

B--But that next Spring, with the help of a Native American named Tisquantum (better known as Squanto), the 50 that survived began planting crops that yielded a plentiful harvest later that Fall.

C--And in early October of that year (1621), in keeping with English custom, these colonists -- who we’ve since come to call “Pilgrims” -- hosted a Harvest Festival, partly to boost their own morale, and partly to impress their new-found Native American allies.

1--So for three days, the 50 colonists and 90 Wampanoag Indians shared in feasting, games, prayer, and fellowship.

2--And while this celebration wasn’t repeated for many years after that (it was a one-time deal back then), *today* we look back to this event as being the origin of the holiday we’ll be celebrating in a few short weeks called “Thanksgiving.” ¹
4. Well, today’s story from John 6 describes another holiday “feast” of sorts, though this one wasn’t planned ahead of time at all -- it just “happened.”

A--The year was about 32 A.D., and the holiday was the annual Jewish Passover, where thousands of people were on the roads from all parts of Palestine making their religious pilgrimage to the holy city of Jerusalem.

1--Now, Jesus had been there before, but this year he’d stayed in the region of Galilee to teach and preach about the Kingdom of God.

2--Everywhere he went, he was followed by large crowds which, no doubt, were made up of many curious travelers on their way to the Jerusalem Passover Festival.

B--And since the crowds gave Jesus little time for himself, one day he and his disciples crossed the Sea of Galilee by boat, hoping to outrun them.

C--But it was no use -- they'd seen his boat on the lake, so many of them traveled (by foot) the 9 miles around the lake to the flat, grassy plain of El-Batiah.

5. And there, after another unsuccessful attempt to get away from the crowd, Jesus finally asks one of his disciples (Philip) where food could be purchased to feed the 5000 people there.

A--As you heard read in today's scripture, Philip answers that even if enough food could be found, it would take the equivalent of 6-month's wages to feed this many people.

B--But another disciple (Andrew) had evidently found a young boy willing to give up his small picnic lunch consisting of *"five barley loaves and two fish."*

1--Now, we have to understand that barley bread was considered a "poor man's bread" -- the bread of the destitute and outcast of society.²

2--And the fish mentioned here were probably a sardine-like fish common to the Sea of Galilee -- most likely pickled to preserve the flavor, and to help the dry barley bread go down when you ate it.

3--Obviously, it wasn't exactly a great holiday feast like we might serve at Thanksgiving today, but Jesus knew that it had the ingredients for a great miracle.

C--So, he took this little boy's meager offerings and Verse 11 tells us that, like we do at Thanksgiving each year, *"He gave thanks"* and then distributed it to those present, *"as much as they wanted."*³

6. Now, for the last three weeks, we've been sharing in a series on stewardship, talking about some of the "SIGNS" of God's work and presence in our world.

A--And as we conclude today, we're reminded once more that one of the greatest of these "signs" is... *GENEROSITY*.

B--Think about it: Verse 14 says that *"When the people saw the SIGN that [Jesus] had done..."* they began to hail him as God's promised Messiah.

1—For them, you see, this miraculous multiplication of loaves and fish was evidence of the fact that God was with Jesus.

2--And yet, what was it that made this great miracle possible in the first place? It was the *generosity* of this small boy!

C--You see, *unlike* a typical Thanksgiving holiday today, in this story Jesus *wasn't* looking for abundant food, or holiday ritual, or even to be around lots of people, but simply for a heart willing to offer what it had for use by him.

1--This little boy didn't have much. But what he *did* have, he offered to Jesus.

2--And from his simple gift came a great miracle.

D—In other words, *HIS* generosity became a “*Jesus Sign*” for the world -- a “sign” telling all those around that God was present and at work in and through Jesus.

--II--

7. You know... OUR generosity can speak the same thing. It can be *our* “**Jesus Sign**” to the world, as well -- one of the ways *we* speak/share the name of Jesus with those around *us*.

A--Something I want you to notice that I didn't catch until just recently is that this little boy didn't share his picnic lunch *directly* with Jesus. Instead, he shared it with the *disciples*, who in turn *brought* it to Jesus.

B--Now, I don't know about you, but I believe there's a strong argument to be made that the disciples here represent God's community of faith (the church), who's task it is (among other things) to receive and steward the resources offered to Jesus through it.

C--If so, then what that means is that when you and I give generously of our time, talents and (yes) our money to the work of God through our *church*, then just like this little boy, we're actually providing Jesus with the raw materials for the making of great miracles that can bless others.⁴

1--Sure, in church circles we sometimes call them “*ministries*” and “*programs*,” and our Finance Committee refers to them as “*line items*” in our church “*Budget*.”

2--But in the *spiritual* scheme of things, they are simply the raw resources used by Jesus to work miracles in the lives of men, women, boys and girls.

3--And that makes our church “Budget” nothing more than the financial dimension of A spiritual “strategic plan” to reach our community for Jesus Christ.

D--You see, when you and I support the work of our church through *the commitment of our financial tithes and offerings*, what we're doing (among other things) is *the spiritual equivalent of offering Jesus our “picnic lunches.”*

8. I sometimes wonder if the world today is denied miracle after miracle, victory after victory, because *you and I* are not willing to offer our financial and material resources to Jesus.

A--Like the crowd that Passover afternoon, most of us want to hear great preaching and great music, we want programs for our children & youth, and ministries that help the needy.

B--But like the *majority* of the crowd that day, too many of us want someone *else* to offer *their* lunch (because we plan to keep ours!).

C--And yet, all it takes is *one* person willing to say, “*Lord, I don’t have much, but what I have I’ll offer to you. Please take & use it as the ingredients of a miracle through my church.*”

9. You see, like in this story, when Jesus invites us to share our resources, He doesn’t care about what we consider to be our “deficiencies” -- whether or not we think we have a lot to give, or can even *afford* to give it.

A--No. He calls us simply to offer what we have, to watch as he “gives thanks,” and then to watch him multiply our gifts to bless others.⁵

B--As you may have heard it said before... *little is always much in the hands of Christ.*

--III--

10. So if you’re looking for a way to make a difference in the world -- to provide Jesus with the ingredients for the making of God’s miracles -- then today we’re invited to a time of commitment to God through the work of this, God’s church here at East Cobb UMC.

[Ushers pass out commitment cards, along with pencils/pens]

A--As a tangible response to Christ’s invitation, for the next few minutes, I invite you to prayerfully complete your commitment card, and (when you’re ready) bring it up to the altar to commit to God.

B--When everyone’s finished, I’ll then offer a prayer over them all.

11. Remember, *GENEROSITY* is a “sign” of Jesus’ presence and work not only in our *own* lives, but in the world itself.

A--So, will you (like the boy in today’s story) be generous with what you have so that Christ can perform miracles for others through *your* gifts to Him through His church?

B--Are you willing for *your* generosity to be a “*Jesus Sign*” to others today?

12. **[CONGREGATION COMPLETES & TURNS IN COMMITMENT CARDS...]**

13. **[PRAYER OVER COMMITTED CARDS...]**

ENDNOTES:

1. Starting in 1676, a proclamation was made marking a religious “Day of Thanksgiving” in some of the New England colonies. Over time, this religious holiday gradually added secular overtones, celebrating abundance and family, and evolved into a yearly local New England Thanksgiving holiday customarily held on a Thursday in November.

In 1863, however, President Abraham Lincoln’s issued a proclamation making it a national holiday, and it thereafter included the tone of national unity as one of its focus points. In 1941, the U.S. Congress permanently fixed the date to the fourth Thursday of November. [For more information on the Pilgrims, the “First Thanksgiving,” and the origins of the Thanksgiving holiday, see www.pilgrimhall.org/f_thanks.htm].

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2. A regulation in the *Mishnah*, the Jewish Law Code, said that a woman caught in adultery must bring a sin offering of bread made from barley flour, since barley was the food of beasts, and adultery was the sin of a beast. For that reason, barley bread was cheap and easy to come by, and so was considered the bread of the poor and outcasts of society.
 3. Notice here that the act and attitude of “thanksgiving” is one component of the makings of a miracle.
 4. For example, through the daily/weekly work of your church here at East Cobb UMC, Jesus feeds the hungry, saves the souls of those who don’t yet know him and matures the souls of those who do, teaches our children and youth about himself, inspires the singing of music to bring glory and praise to His Father, brings healing and wholeness to those wounded and struck ill by life, and a whole host of other “miraculous” things.
 5. God’s not so much interested in our ability as in our AVAILability.