

Today, we are finishing up our sermon series called *Living for Others: The Importance of Missions*. Over the last few weeks we have talked about how God is calling each of us to live for more than ourselves. God is calling us to live for God and care about what is happening to others in the world around us.

Today, we get to talk about what happens when we take the risk to live for God. It is not easy to risk for God. Often we feel inadequate.

A number of years ago, I had the great fortune of being able to lead a mission trip to Bolivia. It was and remains one of the most significant experiences of my life.

I was in Bolivia, the second poorest country in the Western Hemisphere, during a time of crisis in the Methodist Church of Bolivia. The crisis was caused because a Bishop of the church started to abuse his power and take over Church properties and funds and use them as his own private properties and funds. When the denomination went through a legal process to remove him from office he seized property and went to court to retain property.

It was an ugly mess that eventually ended up in the Bolivian Supreme court.

One afternoon when I was in Bolivia, I was working building a three-foot deep trench that would be the foundation of a new building, when I received a phone call from the New Bishop of Bolivia. When I took the call, he asked if I would please come to LaPaz and appear before the Supreme Court of the land and let them know that I represented 10 million United Methodists in the United States and we were watching their proceedings.

Needless to say, I was shocked at what he was asking me to do. I said, "Look, I am not all that important. I am here on a mission trip.

I have work clothes. I don't have dress clothes. I am an Associate Pastor. I don't really represent anyone."

I went on and made several excuses as to why I was not a good person to be sent on this task.

The truth is I really felt inadequate. After all, I grew up on the plains of North Dakota, the son of an average, hard-working couple. I didn't feel all that special. I didn't feel like I should be sent anywhere to do an important task. Do you know what that is like?

In our scripture for today, Jesus is inviting his disciples and all of us on a task, on a mission. In this scripture he sees people who are hurting, who are lost. He takes time to feed their souls and preach to them.

Then he sees their need for food and he says to his disciples, you feed them. The disciples are overwhelmed. They all come up with excuses as to why they couldn't feed the people. They came up with excuses, just like I came up with excuses. When you are challenged to get involved, when you are challenged to take a risk, how good at coming up with excuses are you?

One of the excuses they come up with is, look, we don't have enough. I love Jesus' response. He asks, "What do you have?"

When they say, "Five loaves and two fish." Jesus says, "Bring it here."

What God wants, is to work with us, with what we have. That is what we often forget. God wants to work through us to touch this world. God wants to work through us to make a difference in this world. God wants to work through us, for who we are.

The great news is that we don't have to be perfect. We don't have to have our lives all together. We just need to be willing to let God work in us and through us, flawed as we may be.

We know the rest of the story. Jesus was able to take what they had, to offer it to God and hand it out to the people. And it was enough. In fact, it was more than enough to meet the needs that were there.

When we are willing to let God work in us and through us, we get to see God work in amazing, surprising ways. When we are willing to take a risk, we can see how that motivates others to join in and make a difference.

A long time ago, John Wesley, the founder of the Methodist Movement said, "Let's light a fire for Christ and stand back and watch how people come to the fire."

There were once three little boys talking on the playground about their fathers. One little boy said, "My dad scribbles a few words on a piece of paper, calls it a poem and he gets money for it." The second little boy said, "Really, that's nothing. My dad scribbles some words on paper, he calls it a song. And when he sings it, people pay him money to hear it."

The third little boy said, "Really, that's nothing. My dad scribbles a few words on a piece of paper, he calls it a sermon, and it takes four adults to collect all of the money."

I love that story. The boys certainly misunderstood the importance of their fathers. But what it highlights for me is how in the church we work together to make ministry happen. When we take the risk to let God work through us, amazing things happen.

So long ago, when I was trying to get out of going to LaPaz to see the Bolivian Supreme Court, the work crew that I went with, believed I should go to the Supreme Court.

So I woke the next day, wearing borrowed clothes from borrowed pants, to borrowed shoes to a borrowed shirt, tie and suit coat. The only things that were mine were the socks and underwear I was wearing.

But I went. I saw the need. I spoke to the Supreme Court Justices. I reminded them that United Methodists around the world were watching them and the decision they would make.

Less than a year later, they decided in favor of the United Methodist Church. The Bishop in Bolivia who invited me to come told me afterward that my presence made a difference.

God wants to make a difference in our world. God wants to work through you. When we say yes to God, using the gifts we have, it actually motivates others to say yes to God as well. So today, I wonder, are you willing to let God work through you?

May God help us all live lives that are faithful.

Amen