

“There Really is Enough”
Matthew 14:15-21
Brentwood First - 10/26/08
Mike Magee

Scene 1: The crowds followed him on foot from the towns. Jesus said, "You give them something to eat." His disciples said, "We have only five loaves and two fish. Send the crowds away."

Compassion fatigue. We all suffer from it. Whenever we turn the news off because we cannot bear to see the devastation of hurricanes or war. Whenever we walk away from someone who is crying. Whenever we say, "I understand," not because we empathize, but to get someone to quit complaining. Whenever we look away from a homeless person under the bridge. Compassion fatigue.

740,000 Americans are homeless, about 200,000 families. At \$45,000 per Habitat home, we calculate \$9 billion dollars to house all of America's homeless. This overwhelms us. We suffer from compassion fatigue.

47 million Americans have no health insurance, most of them children. At \$2000 a year for health insurance, we calculate \$94 billion a year to provide health insurance for all of America's uninsured. This overwhelms us. We suffer from compassion fatigue.

What are uninsured Americans?

They can't afford health insurance, or,
they have pre-existing conditions, and so,
they have limited access to health plans and benefits.
No matter what, they live sicker and die younger.

And 1 in 7 is 47 million Americans too many without health insurance.

Listen to what John Goodman, the architect of one of the health care plan proposals, has to say, "So I have a solution. And it will cost not one thin dime," Mr. Goodman said. "The next president of the United States should sign an executive order requiring the Census Bureau to cease and desist from describing any American – even illegal aliens – as uninsured. Instead, the bureau should categorize people according to the likely source of payment should they need care. "So, there you have it. Voila! Problem solved."

But uninsured Americans are less likely to seek health care and more likely to die because they have no health insurance. A 2002 Institute of Medicine Report estimated 18,000 unnecessary adult deaths because of no health insurance. The Urban Institute estimated that

22,000 died in 2006 for the same reason. Goodman apparently thinks they were “effectively insured.”

Emergency rooms cannot by law turn away anyone in need of urgent medical care. Listen to what one of our politicians has to say about the uninsured: "I mean, people have access to health care in America. After all, you just go to an emergency room." But the most expensive health care given is in the emergency room. This is not a solution. Not only is ER care the most expensive way to get health care, but it also does not provide dental care, eye exams, therapy, routine check-ups, or prenatal care. Moreover, the availability of good emergency room care is in decline. In 2006, 119 million visits were made to ERs, up from 90 million in 1996. At the same time, the number of hospital ERs dropped to fewer than 4,600, from nearly 4,900, causing wait times to also increase.

The disciples have been walking all day. They do not have cars, motorcycles, segues, bicycles, or even horses. They have their feet. When the Bible says they went from here to there, it means, they walked. And there were no paved streets or sidewalks. They walked through dust, and they walked through mud. On sunny days they have dust in their hair, dust in their nostrils, and dust in their eyes. On wet days they have mud between their toes and splattered on their clothes. And everywhere they go, the lame, the lepers, those foaming at the mouth, and those talking out of their head, follow. The disciples suffer the same compassion fatigue that beset Mother Therese in Calcutta. No wonder Time Magazine reports she began having difficulty with her faith. She was only a human being. Compassion fatigue.

Most people in third world countries, like Guatemala, only eat one meal a day. And Palestine 2000 years ago was a third world country. It was the middle of the day, time for the only meal, and they were hungry. And Jesus says, "You give them something to eat." No wonder they respond, "Send the crowds away." They have compassion fatigue. But we must discover if God's vision for us is compassion fatigue, or something else.

Scene 2: Jesus had compassion on them.

Ever now and then someone gets to you. You go to a U 2 or Michael W Smith concert, and you are fascinated by a certain charity they talk about. Or someone close to you becomes sick, and you send them a note or call them or take them a cake. Or you roll your window down, and give the homeless person at the exit ramp a dollar. Or, staff Shalom Family Clinic for the indigent and refugees, like Frank Freemon does every Friday and Saturday. Or, despite a falling stock market, you show up at a fund raising event for a mission trip. When you do these things, you are showing God's compassion. Just like Jesus did 2000 years ago.

Stewardship is PLANNED compassion. Making choices. Intentional planning. Planning how much out of what God has given you that you are going to return to God.

Planning before you come to church, how much you are going to write a check for. In fact, planning a year in advance, how much you are going to support church mission and ministries. Stewardship is planned compassion. Compassion on the homeless at the soup kitchen at Downtown Presbyterian Church. Compassion on the residents of Somerfield nursing home on Sunday afternoons. Compassion on children and families suffering from autism. Compassion on the sick, hungry, thirsty, and illiterate children of Guatemala, the second poorest country in our hemisphere.

But there is a problem. Our pie is too small and all the slices of our pie have already been given away. We want to feed the homeless, but do not have enough time or money. We want to make a financial pledge to the church, but do not want to commit with the stock market crash, and we have so much on our plate already.

Scene 3: Jesus told the people to sit down on the grass. Taking the five loaves and the two fish and looking up to heaven, he gave thanks and broke the loaves. They all ate and were satisfied, and the disciples picked up twelve basketfuls of broken pieces that were left over. The number of those who ate was about five thousand.

So how do we pay for the \$9 billion it will take to house America's homeless? Or the \$94 billion it will cost to insure America's uninsured?

You tell me.

Let's see. NASA costs 21 billion tax dollars a year, with individual missions like the photography trip to Saturn costing 2 billion dollars. Beautiful photographs, yes. Why, even technological breakthroughs like the breakfast drink Tang is a result of the space program. But tell that to the homeless. And tell that to the parents of an uninsured child with leukemia. To them, the 21 billion tax dollars spent for trips to uninhabited planets is like rearranging the deck chairs on the Titanic. Irrelevant.

Let's see. The Iraq war costs 124 billion tax dollars a year, more than enough to house all of our homeless, and insure all of our uninsured.

124 billion tax dollars a year is 341 million dollars a day. The money spent in just one day on the Iraq war could instead provide homes for 6500 families. Or provide 163,000 people with health insurance. The money spent in ONE DAY on the Iraq war.

On a macroeconomic level, it seems housing all of our homeless and providing health insurance for all of our uninsured, are things we really can do. But only if we want to. Only if we consider the homeless and the uninsured children worthy. It is a question of priorities. A question of choices. And planning. We can as a nation choose to wage war against a sovereign country; a country that both sides of the fence agree did not house the terrorists responsible for 9/11. Or as a nation we can choose to fund health insurance for our 47

million uninsured. As a nation we can choose to take pretty pictures of the rings of Saturn. Or as a nation we can choose to build homes for our 740,000 American homeless.

What about on a microeconomic level? God calls us to responsible stewardship of God's creation. Just as on a macroeconomic level, stewardship is both planned compassion and making choices. God has given you the clothing on your back, food in your stomach, and a roof over your head. We take these things for granted, when others do not have even these bare necessities.

Conclusion

Look at how your financial contributions to this church were put to work in 2008:

- 1) We financially supported and staffed the soup kitchen at Downtown Pres on the third Wednesday of each month
- 2) We lead a worship and communion service at the Somerfield Nursing Home every Sunday afternoon at 3:30.
- 3) We financially supported and hosted Cub Scout pack 302 who meets regularly at our church.
- 4) We are home to a women's AA group who meets weekly at our church.
- 5) Next month we are partnering with the Autism Foundation of Tennessee for a Mother's Day Out program for special needs children.
- 6) And we provide financial support for Roger and Gloria Marriott, Presbyterian missionaries to Guatemala, the second poorest country in our hemisphere. The Petén region, the poorest area of Guatemala, recently suffered flooding, with some Mayan-Kekchi villages under 12 feet of water. You are supporting four of us, who are joining 10 others from our Presbytery, on a medical mission and disaster relief team to the Petén. We leave this Saturday, traveling into the very heart of this international disaster area.

The Great Ends of our church, which are its mission statement, are

the proclamation of the Gospel for the salvation of humankind;
the shelter, nurture, and spiritual fellowship of the children of God;
the maintenance of divine worship; the preservation of the truth; the promotion of social righteousness; and the exhibition of the Kingdom of Heaven to the world.

Your planned compassion, your stewardship of the blessings God has given you, made all these things possible in 2008.

As Jesus would say, 'Well done, good and faithful servant; you have been trustworthy in a few things, I will put you in charge of many things; enter into the joy of your master.'

In two Sundays, on November 9, I am going to ask you to turn in your financial pledge for 2009.

Glory be to God, Hallelujah, and all God's people say ...