

A man came from Baal Shalishah, bringing the man of God twenty loaves of barley bread baked from the first ripe grain, along with some heads of new grain. "Give it to the people to eat," Elisha said.

⁴³ **"How can I set this before a hundred men?" his servant asked. But Elisha answered, "Give it to the people to eat. For this is what the LORD says: 'They will eat and have some left over.' "** ⁴⁴ **Then he set it before them, and they ate and had some left over, according to the word of the LORD. (NIV 84)**

Theme: Help others in their time of need.

1. He generously gives to us and through us
2. He promises to take care of us

You don't really see them up here in Standish, but you see them in Bay City and Saginaw, and even more so in place like Flint or Detroit—the homeless, the bums, the beggars. They have very little, not even a home to sleep in; they spend most of their days begging for money, looking for handouts. I don't have to go into any detail when I say that the economy is still struggling here in Arenac County. While there are some signs of improvement and things are getting better in some parts of the country, Michigan as a whole, and specifically in our area things can still be a struggle. And so about four-to-five people a month call the churches number looking for some sort of handout. Sometimes it's a little gas money; sometimes it's free food; but mostly it's looking for us to pay their gas or electric bill—especially in the winter.

How do you usually respond to situations like that? What do you do when you pass a beggar on the street? Or if you are driving on 25 going into Bay City; and you see a homeless man while waiting for the light on Euclid? What if someone calls you looking for 20 bucks in gas to get back home; or someone who wants a couple hundred dollars to keep the house warm during the winter?

When our text for today took place it was a hard economic time because of a famine going on in Israel. No one had much to eat or much to give. But Elisha had 100 people with him. We aren't exactly sure who these men were, perhaps they were from the schools of the

prophets; or perhaps they were simply believers who were following a true prophet instead of a false one.

It is a situation similar to the one found in our gospel for today. 5000 men, not counting women and children, followed Jesus to a remote place along the Sea of Galilee. It was getting late and they had nothing to eat. What should Jesus and the disciples do? Send them away to fend for themselves; let them all go hungry, or figure out some way to feed them?

How would you react? Probably the same way you often react when someone asks you for something today. We often act as if we aren't paying attention when we see a homeless man on the street, or we tell someone looking for some help that you just don't have anything to give. And that may be true. And you certainly have reasons as to why you don't give to them. Many who are homeless are so because they are drunkards or druggies. Those that call looking for a handout often call from their cell phone, so you wonder if they are telling the truth about their financial situation. And maybe it is true that they don't have much money for food or for the electric bill; but that is because they are out wasting their money on booze, cigarettes, and lotto tickets; so you are always skeptical of someone's motivation. But instead of giving someone the benefit of the doubt, we make them prove that they are actually in need and won't waste what you give them.

"It's their own fault," you say. "They could have made better choices with their lives; they could have planned ahead a little better, or not wasted all that they had on needless things. It's not my fault they don't have anything. I was smart and wise and saved my money."

That is basically the reasoning we give which leads us not to help out someone in need. But remember what John says in chapter three of his first letter, **If anyone has material possessions and sees his brother in need but has no pity on him, how can the love of God be in him?**

But look at what the man from Baal Shalishah did in our text for today. Somehow he knew that Elisha was in the area with 100 men and that they were in need of food during this time of famine. He didn't make excuses; and didn't claim that they should have planned better. Instead he made 20 loaves of barely bread and brought it to Elisha along with some grain—this very well could have been all this man had. Then Elisha then took that bread and instead of hoarding it for himself, gave it to his men who were hungry.

Then take a look at our gospel. 5000 men, not counting women and children were hungry and in need of food. Only a boy had food: five small loaves of bread—barley bread again along with two small fish. He gave them up to Jesus and his disciples.

The point is that the man from Baal Shalishah and the boy with Jesus didn't make excuses; they didn't withhold what they had because everyone else didn't plan. They knew that they had plenty and they wanted to share with those in need.

The same should be said of us. Despite the hard times we have faced, to my knowledge no one here is struggling just to get by. No one here struggles to pay for food or clothing; we all have a roof over our heads. We have things today that we consider necessities that people a generation or two ago never would have dreamed of—multiple cars per household, a T.V. almost in every room, tablets, and cell phones and so on.

But you might say, I just don't have that much to spare after I pay off all my bills. But then you look at some of your bills. Cell phone costs, the price for cable or satellite TV, the internet. We could go on and on. Those three things are bills that we consider necessities but a generation and a half ago no one had those costs. It's often not that we can't afford to give to others, it's that we want so many things that everyone else has, that we often don't have enough for others who actually need necessities.

The Lord has richly blessed us in many ways. Even in these hard times we have more things and better things than ever before. God is a gracious and loving God. He certainly is generous to us no matter how we look at it. And one reason why God is so generous to us is so that he can give to us. God gives to us more than we need so that he can give through us. All that he gives us isn't to be used for us and us alone, not he gives to us beyond our needs so that we can give to those who have true needs.

But still you might baulk. "I just don't think I can afford to give anything away. What if our car breaks down, or someone has to go to the hospital, or I lose my job? I just don't feel comfortable helping anyone out right now." We can offer any excuse that we want—and we often do.

But when it comes down to it, one of the main reasons why we fail to take care of those in need is lack of faith in God. We often don't want

to give to others because we are worried about the future. We aren't quite sure that God will continue to bless us if we help others out. It is a lack of trust in God and his Word that leads us to keep what we have to ourselves, even while others suffer.

But we aren't alone. Elisha's servant doubted the Lord. When the man brought 20 loaves of bread to feed 100 he asked, **how can I set this before 100 men?** The disciples Philip and Andrew also doubted in a way. When Jesus asked, **Where shall we buy bread for these people to eat?** Philip's reply indicated that he didn't even think about Jesus feeding all of them. Andrew too, said about the five loaves of bread and two small fish, **how far will they go among so many?**

Of course you know what happened. The Lord caused the 20 loaves of bread to multiply so that 100 ate and there was some left over. Over 800 years later 5000 men plus women and children—perhaps 10,000 total all ate from five loaves of bread and two small fish and they were satisfied; and over five basketfuls of bread were left!

The Lord has the power to do anything he wants. He can give you whatever his heart desires. If he can feed 100 with 20 loaves of bread and 5000 with 5 loaves of bread and two small fish, then he can bless you with everything, or nothing.

And he promises to take care of you and bless you. Again and again he promises to provide and care for you. Paul says so in our second lesson, **he who supplies seed to the sower and bread for food will also supply and increase your store of seed and will enlarge the harvest of your righteousness.** The Lord promises to make your earthly blessings increase.

But God hasn't just blessed you with earthly blessings—he has given you something worth much more—it is worth more than any amount of gold or silver. No amount of money can buy it and you can't earn it on your own. It was purchased by Christ's holy and precious blood, which was shed on the cross for you. Because of Christ you will enjoy the glories and riches of eternal life as you will dwell with him in heaven forever. These most precious and priceless of all gifts are given to you for free by our gracious Lord.

Because Christ gives so richly to us we use what we have to give to those in need. We don't have to be afraid of giving too much to others—God promises to always provide for us no matter what. There is not a single person who has ever said, "I can't make ends meet because I have given too much to the poor."

In the book of Malachi the Lord essentially dares us to give too much to him and others. **Bring the whole tithe into the storehouse, that there may be food in my house. Test me in this,” says the LORD Almighty, “and see if I will not throw open the floodgates of heaven and pour out so much blessing that you will not have room enough for it.** The Lord promises to give more to us the more we give to others, so we have no reason to hold back what we have. The Lord will always provide for our every need and then some.

I heard a story once about a WELS professor who was investigated by the IRS. The IRS investigated him because they doubted his tax returns. He had given so much to his Church and congregation that the IRS thought he was lying about the amount of charitable deductions he gave. In a way that story is sad—sad that more of us aren’t investigated for the generosity of our giving. Yet at the same time, it can serve as an example to follow. Let us give generously to others without holding back. The Lord has richly blessed us and promises to take care of us; so we use the earthly blessings we do have to help those in need so that they may see the love of Christ in us. Amen.