**Your Bishop Is A Basket Case and Invites Us To Be As Well**

**Mark 6:30-44**

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Last week we heard the story of Zacchaeus, a despicable, wee little man, who when touched by the spirit of Jesus, was transformed into a generous, ethical, hospitable, caring human being. He appears, by the end of the story, to be an energetic, fun-loving, full-of-life kind of guy. I hope I don’t get into trouble for this, but our Bishop, David Bard, reminds me of Zacchaeus. Now it is important to point out that he reminds me of Zacchaeus after Zacchaeus was transformed by the presence of Jesus. After my few encounters with Bishop Bard my impression is that he is a generous, ethical, hospitable, caring, energetic, fun-loving, and full-of-life kind of guy. And all of that is wrapped in a package that I don’t think stands much taller than 5’4”. The Bishop is living proof that a person stands tall, not because of their vertical dimension, rather because of the largeness of their heart. We have a Bishop who stands tall. Even though my eyes are cast down when I am talking with him, he is one whom I cannot help but look up to.

Bishop Bard is fairly new to us. He has been with us now for just over a year. He and his wife, Julie, come to us from Duluth, Minnesota, where he was the senior pastor at First United Methodist Church of Duluth. He was elected Bishop at the North Central Jurisdictional Conference in July of 2016 and moved to Michigan as our Bishop that September. Last June was his first Annual Conference with us in which he was plopped right in the middle of the process where West Michigan and Detroit Conference are uniting to create one new Michigan Area Annual Conference. Which, by the way, we legally become such on January 1, 2019, even though for all intents and purposes we will be acting as one Conference with its new structure beginning this next summer.

So the first sermon that the Bishop delivers to his new charge, the Michigan Annual Conferences, is “Your Bishop is a Basket Case.” He plays the song "A-Tisket, A-Tasket" and re-envisions the line, “I’ve lost it, I’ve lost it, my good sense I’ve lost it. Has someone seen it ‘round, because I can’t live without it.” The self-awareness that to say yes to being bishop means you’ve lost some of your good sense, and the fact that before the service the Bishop was on the floor playing with the children in the designated “play area” of our worship center said to me that we have a Bishop who has been truly touched by the spirit of Jesus.

Let me share with you what he means by calling himself a basket case as articulated in his first sermon to the conferences.

First, he claims not to be the first disciple of Jesus to be a basket case. All you have to do is look at the first disciples of Jesus to understand that basket cases may be the central part of being a Christian. He recounts this passage from Mark 6 that we read today.

The disciples have just returned from what sounds like a successful missionary venture. They are sharing with Jesus what has happened. Jesus then invites them away for a time of rest; for many were coming and going, and they didn’t even have time to eat. However, even though they were trying to sneak away in a boat, many saw them and the direction they were going and ran ahead, so that when Jesus and his disciple land and went ashore, there was huge crowd of people waiting for them. For those who have traveled to Israel and have been to the Sea of Galilee and the northern region where Capernaum and many of the other villages that Jesus visited and lived during his ministry, you can envision how this happened. Galilee is not all that big and it is not that far between villages. By the time Jesus and the disciples pushed out, found a wind, if there was any, or oared there way, it would be easy to race them by foot and beat them to their destination.

Even though Jesus was hoping for a little down time, the Scripture says he had compassion on the crowd and began to teach them.

Time flies when you are having fun and it gets late, so the disciples tell Jesus to send the crowd away so that the people can go home and eat. Jesus nonchalantly responds, “You give them something to eat.” The disciples are flummoxed. They don’t have that kind of food with them or that kind of money to buy food for such a large crowd, even if there were a place to buy food.

By now, these disciples are basket cases. They are anxious and afraid. They are scared. They are scared because of their concern over scarcity. The Bishop muses “perhaps there have been other times in the lives of the disciples where there has been a lack. Scared and perhaps even scarred in the face of scarcity - the overwhelming sensation that we do not have enough for the situation. We are not enough to meet the situation. Scared and scarred, basket cases all.”

Jesus comes from a different perspective. Not that he hasn’t experienced hunger, thirst and the lack of necessary daily amenities, but he fully trusts that God provides what is necessary as long as we freely give and use what we do have. And so he asks, “Well, what do you have?”

After taking inventory, they discover that they have five loaves of bread and two fish. In the mindset of scarcity, that equals nothing when you compare it to the thousands that are in the crowd. But we are not asked to live with the mindset of scarcity. We are asked to live with the mystery of the abundance God provides when we give of what we have.

So Jesus takes what is given, blesses it, breaks it, shares it, and there is enough. In fact, there is more than enough. Baskets are required to collect all that is left over. Twelve baskets to be exact, which the Bishop claims is another miracle. Where did the baskets come from? You didn’t need them to pass out 5 loaves and 2 fish. “These baskets just show up,” in the words of the Bishop, “an outward and visible sign of something else going on, a sign of grace.”

The Bishop concludes:

*Bread and fish become enough, baskets are needed, and in all this people are touched, fed, cared for. The baskets woven from the common materials of the day, become baskets of grace. The disciples, participating in what is happening, being closest to the mystery of what is taking place, also become, in a way, baskets of grace and for grace. They bring what they have. They bring who they are. Allow their gifts to be blessed and broken open and shared and grace happens. The disciples go from basket cases to being baskets of and for grace.*

That, friends, is the very core of God’s invitation to you and me. In love, God calls us to be love. In grace, God calls us to be baskets of grace – to bring our resources and who we are to Jesus to be blessed and opened and then in turn to touch others, feed others, care for others and serve the world.

I know that often we come and don’t feel like we have much to offer. Who we are and what we have seems puny to the enormity of issues with which any one of us, or the world collectively, has to deal with. And, as the Bishop noted, sometimes we come scared and scarred, but God uses what we have to be a graceful blessing.

I was in a conversation late last week where the conversation turned to acknowledging how almost all of us suffer from imposter syndrome. Too often we fall into the mindset that I am not good enough or smart enough, to be doing what I am doing. I am just pretending here, and pretty soon someone is going to find me out. I can promise you any pastor worth their weight in salt has to periodically move through that valley of doubt. First, because there are always those few who are too eager to agree that you are not worthy. But, more importantly, because one realizes the enormity of this office and what it represents, and the responsibilities it carries, and it would be very easy to become a basket case. We come to our work, scared and scarred, but also gifted by God who can use what we have to be baskets of grace.

Let’s bring back Zacchaeus for a moment. He was that last person anyone would have thought could become a basket of grace and for grace. But again, it is not what we bring to the table that matters. It is that we bring whatever it is we are and have to the table. Sometimes it is simply showing up.

Isn’t that one of the lessons our veterans teach us? This weekend we celebrate Veteran’s Day. If nothing else, we need to celebrate that these are men and women who showed up. In talking with many veterans, there aren’t too many who felt like they were totally prepared or equipped to go to war. Especially my parents’ generation who found themselves heading into WWII. My father and uncles and their friends practically ran to the recruiting office to naively sign up for the war. They had no clue what they were getting into. They would not take my father because he had muscular atrophy and could barely walk, but he was there presenting himself to be used.

Jesus calls us to a different kind of warfare, to fight against the evils of indifference, greed, marginalization, and injustice; so that each may come to know that they are a beloved child of God. And we won’t always know how to do that. We won’t always feel that we have what is necessary. But God does not ask us to come fully equipped. God asks us to show up with what we have and who we are. God will weave us into baskets of grace and for grace and there will be overflowing abundance.

I pray that will be true for your life and for mine. Amen.