

July 29, 2006 John 6:1-21

by Douglas Harding

Connections



(#15) I have been reading about Lance Armstrong being in Iowa. The great bicyclist, winner of the Tour-de-France seven times, has been riding RAGBRAI. He came to talk about

cancer and the need for cancer research. And people are connecting with him. Why? Because he is a cancer survivor, he beat the odds. And not only that, he beat the competition seven times in the greatest bike race in the world. While in Iowa he pushed riders up the hills, ate coconut cream pie, sipped a beer, and talked. In short he connected with people, particularly Iowans.



And connections are what our faith is all about. **(#16)** But sometimes we do not connect. Too often we create barriers which insulate us from people's needs.

Picture for a moment the crowd John tells about in his Gospel. That this story occurs in all four gospels is a clue that it was an important story about the ability of

Jesus to provide very personal and powerful service.



(#17) The crucial point here is that the people had an immediate and pressing need, an immediate Person to address that need, and an immediate response to the need.

The crowd that gathered by the Sea of Galilee had some definite needs. John 6:2 tells us that many had come for healing, seeking the cure that getting close to Jesus might provide. Not only that, they were likely far from any town or village that could provide them with some fast food options. These people were hungry — physically and spiritually.



(#18) Jesus knew their needs. Seeing the predicament that was fast reaching crisis proportions, Jesus turned to Philip and asked, “Where are we to buy bread for these people to eat?” (6:5). It’s a rhetorical question, a problem that cannot be easily addressed by simply calling the local bakery and placing an order.

The disciples are thinking scarcity rather than

abundance. Philip does the math — six months' wages wouldn't be enough to give all these people even a bite of food. You can almost imagine the disciples circulating among this crowd with people recognizing their closeness to Jesus and asking them questions: "Can we see Jesus up close? Got anything to eat? Can you tell me if I can get healed here?"

Naturally, the disciples would try to distance themselves from the problem by simply pointing out that because of the huge numbers that day there would be no options and no real possibility of the crowd getting all their needs met personally by Jesus.

Yet the story is about what Jesus wants to do. Unlike in the other gospels, Jesus is not moved here by his compassion. No one had been complaining that they were hungry. No murmurs from the crowd. No restlessness. Nothing even from the disciples. There is no excitement among the crowd. This is not a group of people caught up in the mystery of the feeding. It's not like a bunch of baseball fans waiting to see if a pitcher can pull off a no-hitter. Will these 5,000 people really be fed by five loaves and two tiny fish?

Imagine the little boy's amazement when he sees Jesus use his lunch to feed a crowd the size of RAGBRAI. No one has a lunch sack that big, yet it happens. A miracle some say, a matter of faith according to others. But for a little boy, it was something he would never forget. He connects with Jesus. Along with 5000 others.

That simple act provides an overflowing abundance of food, but also of hope for the crowd. Some scholars believe that Jesus simply pointed out the boy's act of sharing his lunch and that encouraged everyone else to do the same, but such an interpretation misses the real point of the miracle. Jesus had not only given these people food, but in a larger sense he had also given them himself — his touch, his compassion, his word. Later, he would go so far as to allow himself to be broken and his sacrifice distributed as grace for all people in need of hope.

That day Jesus connected. He is still connecting.

Connecting is so important. So this morning I want to shift gears and share with you something personal,

that we might connect.



(#19) Last week I was working on a project and needed a wrench. Once retrieved from the Garage, I started working and then suddenly paused. For in my hand was a relic, an ancient object, something I have had almost my entire life. For the tool I held in my hand was an adjustable wrench my uncle gave me for my seventh birthday.



(#20) I remember that birthday well. My favorite uncle, my mother's brother, had come to visit. We always enjoyed his visits, and still do. For my 7th birthday he took me to the local hardware store, where he bought me a hammer and handsaw, a wrench, pliers and screw drivers. He thought I should have some tools. **(#21)** I still have and use the wrench, pliers and saw.



(#22) The reason this struck me is tomorrow this little fellow turns 50. It's been a long time since his first birthday.

(#23)



For some turning 50 is a major milestone. For me it will be just another day. **(#24)**



(#25) I don't need another wrench. If I needed anything I would turn to the Heifer Project gift catalog, a wonderful source of gifts. Here anyone can connect to Jesus. As he feed the

hungry, so we are called to feed any who hungry. Heifer Project is committed to feeding the world. Dan West, founder of Heifer Project said, "instead of a cup, a cow." So give a goat to an old goat, or ... well you get the idea.