

PAY IT FORWARD

it's about

CARING

and

sharing

IT'S ABOUT

compassion

and

kindness

it's about

GENEROSITY

it's about sacrifice...

AND

love

you get what you give

SO GIVE GOOD

MARLA RAI ANTTONEN

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Welcome

Hymn “Now Thank We All Our God” (UMH #102)

Scripture John 6:8-13 (CEB)

One of his disciples, Andrew, Simon Peter’s brother, said, “A youth here has five barley loaves and two fish. But what good is that for a crowd like this?” Jesus said, “Have the people sit down.” There was plenty of grass there. They sat down, about five thousand of them. Then Jesus took the bread. When he had given thanks, he distributed it to those who were sitting there. He did the same with the fish, each getting as much as they wanted. When they had plenty to eat, he said to his disciples, “Gather up the leftover pieces, so that nothing will be wasted.” So they gathered them and filled twelve baskets with the pieces of the five barley loaves that had been left over by those who had eaten.

Message “Paying It Forward”

For many of us, this story of Jesus feeding the five thousand is familiar. I have heard it quite a few times and think I know it by heart, but as so often happens when reading scripture, I discover something in the story that catches my attention like a phrase that jumps out at me. It is such a small phrase that I almost passed over it, but there, in verse 9, I read, “A youth here has five barley loaves and two fish.”

In the midst of thousands of people, a teenager has five loaves of barley bread and two fish, a remarkable thing for anyone to have in the midst of a crowd where food was scarce. The people who followed Jesus were regular ordinary folks who were looking for healing and hope in Jesus, whom they saw as a teacher and miracle worker. Since Israel was under Roman occupation, many of the Israelites were drained because of Roman taxation, as well as having to pay a temple tax. Jobs were hard to find and caring for their families was challenging.

Wheat was expensive, so the people often ate barley bread because barley was more affordable, and one only had to go fishing to find the rest of their meal. Sharing a meal with another person or family was difficult because they often only had enough to feed their own families. Yet, here was this teenager

who was willing to share his five barley loaves and two fish, and, like Andrew, we might wonder what good that small amount of food would do for such a large crowd.

The disciples couldn't see how it would make any difference, but Jesus knew. The miracle of the loaves and fishes was a statement, saying that God could multiply anything to care for God's children, and we are called to be a part of helping that to happen as we share generously from our own gifts. The disciples were short-sighted, but the teenager was not and offered what he had. Jesus turned it into an abundance of gifts. The boy paid it forward.

God has been paying it forward from the beginning of time. God created the earth; God created everything and put human beings in charge of caring for creation, including other human beings. Jesus came to teach, heal, give hope, and offer his life for humanity. He paid it forward through giving his life for all of us.

When we pay it forward, whether it is a big or seemingly small act of kindness, we are doing something to care for another person, and we don't expect anything in return. One commentator shared this story:

"It started Christmas Eve morning, Tuesday, December 24, 2013, at a Starbucks in Newington, Connecticut. The first customer paid for her drink and left the money for the customer next in line. One customer after the next, some prompted and some not, paid it forward perpetually for four days. This "Pay It Forward" chain came to an end on Saturday, December 28, around 6:00 p.m., 1,468 customers later." (Calvonia Radford devotion from December 26, 2018)

This event may not seem as magnificent as the boy with the bread and fish, but it is one example of doing something to make someone else's day a little brighter and encouraging them to also pay it forward. These are the seeds of generosity that we offer. Proverbs 11:30 says, "The seeds of good deeds become a tree of life, and the wise person wins friends." (NLT)

We don't do good deeds because we want to get on God's "good side." Rather, we do the good of paying it forward as a result of all God has given us and because we walk with Christ on our faith journeys. Ephesians 5:2 says, "*Let love be your guide. Christ loved us and offered his life for us as a sacrifice that pleases God.*" (CEV)

1 John 4:19 tells us, "We love because God first loved us." (CEB) Our response to God's love is to live in ways that reflect and bring the presence of Christ to the world. Paying it forward is one action we can take. We all are able to pay that love of God forward in some way or another.

Just think about the possibilities! They are simple acts of kindness that treat others with respect, regardless of how they are treating us. They are gifts of generosity that require no thank you note, no effusive words of thanks, and no expectations of reciprocation. We pay it forward with acts of kindness just because it is how we live our lives as followers of Jesus.

I have a good friend who regularly practices paying it forward. He has paid for people's meals anonymously, given generously to church yard sales, bought meals for street people, put gas in a young mother's car when she was scrounging to find what little change she had in her wallet, given away his leather coat to a woman in the middle of the winter because she only had a hoodie and was shaking almost uncontrollably, and so many more acts of generosity. He lives his faith out of his gratitude for all God has given him.

Proverbs 11:25 reads, "Generosity will be rewarded: Give a cup of water, and you will receive a cup of water in return." (CEV) When we pay it forward, we don't need to expect anything in return, but we can know in our hearts that we made a difference for someone else, and we are blessed over and over again.

The thing is, the youth in our story generously gave Jesus his bread and fish, which may have been all he had for the next week's meal. But he shared them, and Jesus turned them into an abundant meal for the crowd in front of him with more to spare. Jesus saw their hunger, not only for food, but also their spiritual hunger, and he gave them the food they needed to sustain their bodies, as well as the words of life that he spoke when he taught them on the hillside.

We don't know what happened to the people in that crowd or how many lives were changed that day. We don't know if they found hope in the sharing of the bread and fish or in Jesus' miracle of feeding so many. We don't know if they were inspired to turn around and share with others. But we DO know that Jesus' amazing miracle was an act of caring and love, meeting people where they were, and offering them sustenance for the journey.

When we pay it forward, we offer hope, love, and caring as we share what we can with what we have. We have experienced that here at First United Methodist Church over these past months as we renovate, refresh and restore our centuries-old sanctuary and the rest of the building. Volunteers have tirelessly come in on Saturdays to paint Sunday school rooms, restrooms, lay tile, and so much more.

Three people paid it forward by leaving bequests to the church, which enabled us to hire companies to sand and paint the walls, have the masonry repaired, refurbish the pews, lay new carpet, buy cushions for the pews and reupholster the pulpit chairs, and work with us to upgrade electronic equipment. Others have helped us outside with shrubs and the appearance of the grounds.

All of these businesses and people have gone over the top in helping us to move forward in ministry in this time and this place. It's not just about the building, but we have the gift of a beautiful facility that is a housing for ministry to our community around us as we minister to the needs of those who live in Portsmouth and the greater Portsmouth area.

On September 12 – **seven weeks to go** – we will gather together in person again after a wait of 139 weeks. While COVID-19 raged, we weren't meeting together in person, but we were taking care of each other in so many other ways: Zoom gatherings, worship videos, prayers, phone calls, cards, internet updates, mailings, and much more. Although we weren't meeting in person, we who are the church, was active in the world.

So, as we continue to strive to “pay it forward,” may we remember the generosity of a teenager who offered his five barley loaves and two fish, and Jesus turned them into a feast for thousands. May we remember those who worked here in our lovely building and gave what they had, even going above and beyond the work that they had to do, to improve what we have. What may seem like a small gift can multiply the blessings of God in our world. Let us keep on Paying It Forward! Amen.

Prayer

Amazing Jesus, you fed more than five thousand people on a hillside by multiplying five loaves and two fish. You taught all of us about generosity, sharing, caring, compassion, kindness, and love. This is how you ask us to live our lives as your disciples. Through your example, we learn about “paying it forward,” about giving selflessly, and about bringing the love of God to others to multiply our gifts. Inspire, empower, and lead us as we strive to be faithful to that calling. Amen.

Lord's Prayer

Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name, your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as in heaven. Give us today our daily bread. Forgive us our sins as we forgive those who sin against us. Save us from the time of trial and deliver us from evil. For the kingdom, the power, and the glory are yours, now and forever. Amen.

Hymn “Spirit of the Living God” (UMH #393)

Sending Forth



WE LIFT UP IN PRAYER

Juliann
Joan Allen
Naomi
Erin Frane
Madeline
Charles Gilman
Josh Jones
Jenn

Harry Junkins
Marilyn & Gil
Donna Smith
Sophia
Bobbie Noble
Dan Strange
Danny Westbrook
Marion Collishaw

Christine & her parents
Those in nursing and assisted living care
Our Church family



WHO WE ARE

FUMC PORTSMOUTH A RECONCILING CONGREGATION

We, the congregation of the First United Methodist Church of Portsmouth, New Hampshire, are dedicated in worshipping, learning, and serving with all people as we embrace Jesus Christ's message of love and acceptance. As a United Methodist Church we stand fully behind the statement "Open Hearts, Open Minds, and Open Doors". We celebrate our diversity and invite all persons regardless of age, gender, racial or ethnic background, sexual orientation, marital or socioeconomic status, nationality, physical or mental ability into full membership and participation in the life of this community of faith.



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