

Advent in a Small-Town Week 2

12/13/2020

Introduction: Jesus' Advent is more than a Baby in a Manger.

A. If Jesus had stayed in the manger, we will all be sunk.

1. Thankfully, Jesus grew and matured.
2. Thankfully, Jesus went out and taught, preached, and healed people.
3. **If we leave Jesus in the manger, we miss out on the significance of His Advent.**

B. The power of Jesus' first coming has to do that Jesus came to "be with us".

1. He came to be with us in our struggles, our pain, and our darkest hours.
2. He came to heal the sick, free the oppressed, and to restore the broken.
3. The beauty of all of this is that Jesus did not confine His ministry to the rich or to the city but to the people on the margins.

C. One of my favorite passages happens in Luke 9:10-17.

1. Here, Jesus feeds the Five Thousand.
2. Within this passage, we how Jesus used out of the way places and unseen people to do amazing things.

Luke 9:10-16 (CSB)

FEEDING OF THE FIVE THOUSAND

¹⁰When the apostles returned, they reported to Jesus all that they had done. He took them along and withdrew privately to a town called Bethsaida.

¹¹When the crowds found out, they followed him. He welcomed them, spoke to them about the kingdom of God, and healed those who needed healing.

¹²Late in the day, the Twelve approached and said to him, "Send the crowd away, so that they can go into the surrounding villages and countryside to find food and lodging, because we are in a deserted place here."

¹³"You give them something to eat," he told them.

"We have no more than five loaves and two fish," they said, "unless we go and buy food for all these people." ¹⁴(For about five thousand men were there.)

Then he told his disciples, "Have them sit down in groups of about fifty each." ¹⁵They did what he said, and had them all sit down. ¹⁶Then he took the five loaves and the two fish, and looking up to heaven, he blessed and broke them. He kept giving them to the disciples to set before the crowd.

1. When Jesus wanted to get away, He went towards the small-towns.

A. Jesus was constantly being followed by crowds.

1. Why not?
2. Who else could heal them.
3. Who else was casting out demons and bringing life.
4. Who else taught like this and spoke like this?

B. Jesus would consistently look for out of the way places to pray and to get away.

1. Don't get me wrong: Jesus loved people.
2. But He recognized the importance of private prayer and private worship away from the crowds and people.
3. Today, we might call this behavior "introverted".
4. Jesus called it necessary.

C. On this occasion, Jesus sought a place away from the city and the crowds following him.

1. Because this encounter is one of the few listed in each of the 4 Gospels, we have a general idea of where it took place.
2. It was out in countryside, with the nearest city being Bethsaida.
3. Yet, even in the remote area, the crowds found Him.

2. What were the crowds looking for?

A. Notice, the crowds did not come to Jesus looking for physical food.

1. They came to hear about Jesus and to be touched by Him.
2. They came because Jesus had what the world didn't.
3. They came because Jesus was unique among other teachers, rabbis, sages, and wisemen.
4. They came because Jesus had something that they wanted.

B. Jesus' response was to give them what they needed.

1. **First, Jesus welcomed them.**

- a. That speaks to me.
- b. They were not intrusions, problems to be fixed, or people to be avoided.
- c. They were people to be welcomed.
- d. Are we doing a good job of welcoming people?
 1. I think we do a good job of welcoming people into this body we call the church.
 2. But what about our town and state? People are moving here, are we welcoming them with the hope of sharing the Gospel with them?
 3. What about immigrants?
 - a. Our series in Exodus will talk a lot about God's treatment for immigrants and those not like us.

b. Are we acting like Jesus in welcoming people with the hope of introducing them to the Kingdom?

c. Small-towns are great, but we can be stand-offish.

d. Perhaps Jesus welcomed people not like Himself because HE knew what it was to be a foreigner?

e. Not only did Jesus come from heaven, but His family had to flee to Egypt for a season to avoid the wrath of Herod.

e. Jesus welcomed them.

2. Then, Jesus spoke to them about the kingdom of God.

a. The Kingdom of God is one of the most important themes in all of Scripture and Jesus' most important preaching theme.

b. The Kingdom of God has to do with God's reign and rule.

1. Jesus not only taught about the Kingdom and it's coming, He invited people to be part of it.

2. This probably made great sense to people living in the Roman Empire.

a. To be a citizen of Rome, you had to have been born in the right place or had to earn your citizenship through military service, or buy it.

b. Jesus consistently invited the least likely of people to enter into the Kingdom of God.

3. Jesus taught that there was a place where "God rules as king". And that everyone could be part of that kingdom.

c. Even today, the Kingdom of God should be a primary message.

1. You have been invited to a life that declares God as King in your life.
2. That life begins here, in this world, and finds completion when Jesus returns.
3. **To enter the Kingdom of God is to enter into a life different than that offered by the world.**

3. Then Jesus healed the sick.

1. **Jesus' love and compassion were not only for a person's soul but also for their physical well-being.**
2. Jesus healed the sick.
3. He cast out demons.
4. Jesus' ministry was an amazing mixture of teaching and demonstration of power.
5. We believe that is what God still desires for us today.
6. We are to be strong in preaching **and** teaching **and** demonstrations of power.

3. It was late in the day when the disciples had a great idea.

A. Send the crowd away, so they can go to the surrounding villages to find food.

1. This is not a bad idea.
2. The people had been with Jesus all day.
3. They had travelled to get there.
4. They were hungry and there was no natural means to feed them.

B. But, sometimes the natural problem has a supernatural solution.

1. Jesus said "You feed them".

2. But they couldn't.
3. It was not the Apostles who supplied the miracle.
 - a. Don't miss this point:
 - b. The miracle was NOT in the hands of the Apostles.
 - c. Jesus knew this.
 - d. Jesus knew that they could, in no way, feed five-thousand people.

C. But Jesus could.

1. This was never about what the Apostles could do.
 - a. Twice Jesus feeds large crowds.
 - b. Neither time, does the Apostles take the place of Jesus in the miraculous multiplication of bread.
2. **When we make ourselves the focus of miracles, we miss out on God's purpose.**
 - a. Can you think of another time when God fed His people in a wilderness setting?
 - b. Of course, the answer is when God fed manna to His people for 40 years in the wilderness.
 - c. Hebrews tells us that it was Jesus who was the water and bread that followed them in the Wilderness.
 - d. *If you make the miracle about you, you miss out on what God is doing.*
3. Jesus' question exposed the Apostle's weakness and created opportunity for Jesus to demonstrate His power.

D. Therefore, Jesus has the crowd gather in groups of 50.

1. He blesses the bread and fish.
2. And He puts the miracle in the hands of the Apostles who then distribute the miracle to the crowd.

3. The same Jesus who healed the sick and invited the crowd into the Kingdom refused to overlook the physical need of food.

a. A healthy Church meets the spiritual and the physical needs of its community.

b. Ministry that ministers to one, at the expense of the other, is out of balance and not what Jesus modeled.

But how does all of this fit into the theme of Advent in a Small-Town?

At least 3 ways.

#1. Even in faraway places, people can find Jesus.

A. Too many people believe that you have to move to the city to do any good.

1. But that simply isn't true.

2. It could, in fact, be said that Jesus did His best ministry out in the faraway places.

3. It was in the country sides that Jesus fed 5,000 and then 4,000 men plus their families.

B. **If we avoid the small-places, we miss places that God loves.**

1. If God can't save people in the small places, He can't save people in the city.

2. But the Good-news is that Jesus' loves people no matter where they are.

a. God loves Missouri, rural and city.

b. God loves people living in Washington DC and Portland and Minneapolis.

c. God loves all people, everywhere.

C. In the days to come, I ask that you believe with me for a move of God to happen right here.

1. The same God that can move in the city is the same God that loves the country.

2. We need a move of God just as much here as anywhere else.

3. So Lord, remind us that you do not despise the small places.

#2. Jesus can use “little” people to accomplish His purpose.

A. John’s version of this miracle says that the 5 loaves and 2 fish came from a young boy in the crowd.

1. Perhaps his mother had packed the lunch.

2. Maybe he packed it himself with enough to feed himself.

3. But, at some point, he gets the attention of the Apostle Andrew who “volunteers” the loaves and the fishes.

B. I love it that it was a child’s lunch that became the start to a miracle.

1. Quiet possibly, this was the first “Happy Meal” in history.

2. The kid offering the lunch was not much.

3. Unlike our culture where kids are often worshipped, kids were not in that day.

- a. This was not a great man offering to be used by Jesus.

- b. It was a small-boy.

- c. If this was a Christmas move or hallmark, he would have been an elf.

C. **There are no little people in God’s Kingdom.**

1. Perhaps, that is what this boy had learned from Jesus’ teaching.

2. That, in God’s Kingdom, there are no junior memberships.

3. There are no distinctions between rich or poor, male or female, slave or free.

4. Everyone who enters the Kingdom has the same, full-fledged citizenship.

5. And as a citizen, he was happy to give what he had to be used by Jesus.

D. To Jesus', it doesn't matter where you come from.

1. We can make a big deal out of it.

2. But Jesus doesn't.

3. He knows everything about you and still invites you to join.

4. His Advent to a Small Town reminds us that Jesus uses the most unlikely of people from the most unlikely of places to do the most amazing things.

Lastly,

#3. Jesus can multiply small giftings to do great miracles.

A. It isn't a question of whether I am talented enough for God to use me. The question is "am I willing".

1. Are we willing to come to Jesus with our life and talents and say "It isn't much, but will you use it?"

2. Are we willing to be vulnerable with our smallness so that Jesus is glorified through it?

3. Are we willing to come, like a child, with an incredible faith that declares that Jesus can?

B. Are we willing to give up and sacrifice what is dear to us so that Jesus can be made known?

1. The boy GAVE his lunch to Jesus.

2. There is coming a moment where God is going to ask you "are you willing to give this away so I can bless it"?

a. Are you willing to give up opinions, positions, rights, and opportunities so God can do a miracle?

b. Are you willing to give away your comfort, your desires, your preferences so that others can be blessed?

c. Are you willing to be poured out so that Jesus can be glorified?

d. For many of you, the answer will be no.

C. Of all the people in the crowd who was willing to offer a few loaves and fishes, it was a young boy.

1. You can't tell me that, out of 5,000 men, his was the only food?

2. But he was the only one willing to sacrifice what was his so Jesus can multiply it and bless it.

3. Are you willing to give your little so Jesus can make much out of it?

Closing: When Jesus was done, and all had eaten, there were 12 baskets left.

A. Not only did Jesus make enough, He made more than enough.

1. Not only did Jesus fill their bellies that day but there was enough left-over to share.

2. When we trust Jesus with what we have, we find there is more than enough.

3. So many times during outreaches around here, we have seen God multiply our provisions.

a. We have seen God use us to give away supplies intended for 35 or 40 people to over 50 and then have some leftover.

b. We have seen God stretch groceries and Christmas toys to be more than enough.

c. Financially, I have seen God entrust us with finances, we invest it in ministry and facilities, and there still be money leftover.

4. But if you never give Jesus what little you have, you will never experience the blessing of multiplication.

B. Recently, I have become friends with a Mennonite pastor in Kansas who wrote a book called "God's Country".

1. What he writes about this story provides incredible insight to how God views even the insignificant fragments that were left after the miracle"

2. Thus, when Jesus called the disciples to "gather up the fragments that remain, that nothing may be lost" (John 6:12 KJV), he was pointing beyond bread and baskets to the whole people of God. It was a sign. Jesus was talking about the church. Let none be left behind or ignored or disparaged. Let none be lost. Gather up all the fragments into the kingdom. Without the rural church, some fragment would be lost. The rural church represents God's commitment to be with all people, everywhere, through the church, which is Christ's "body, the fullness of him who fills all in all" (Ephesians 1:23). This includes all peoples and all places, big and small. The church cannot remain in the city or suburbs and be the church.¹

C. When Jesus came to Earth some 2,000 years ago, He came so that none maybe lost.

1. He came to a small-town, walked with insignificant people through insignificant places and did extraordinary things.

2. If you haven't yet realized it, God has called you to this place.

3. So don't let your lack, your smallness, or anything keep you from being obedient.

4. If can use a boy's lunch to feed five-thousand plus people, God can use someone living in Licking, MO to be the conduit of incredible blessings.

¹ Roth, Bradley. God's Country (p. 34). Herald Press. Kindle Edition.