

Sermon for August 2, 2020 by Pastor Hanberry "Weaving the Future' Part 2 (Ser20-31) Text: The Feeding of the 5,000 -- Matthew 14:13-21

Mark Twain said "I have my values, and if you don't like them, well, I've got some others". As we continue this week to consider and receive the new Identity, Mission, Vision and Values Statements for Trinity UCC, we can say with the great wit, Mark Twain, we have our values. Now if you don't like them, then instead saying "well, I've got some others," I can say on behalf of the groups in the church envisioning the future together, "the nine values we put forth are our values. Period. They are more than sufficient for our life together as a congregation.

Thus, when we say what we value we meant it: **Love God; Compassionate love of everyone; Welcoming inclusion; Christian Discipleship and Service; Inspiring Worship; Committed to Community; Reaching out to all Generations; Peace and Justice; and that we value the Bible as the Foundation of our Faith.** These values can be thought of as the imperatives of our lives together. They are the foundation of our faith and of what it means to be a community of faith, the church of Jesus Christ.

And when the disciples reminded Jesus that the thousands of people sitting on the hillside all day, listening to his teachings, were getting physically hungry, ¹⁶ *Jesus said to them, "They need not go away; you give them something to eat."* ¹⁷ *They replied, "We have nothing here but five loaves and two fish."* ¹⁸ *And he said, "Bring them here to me."* ¹⁹ *Then he ordered the crowds to sit down on the grass. Taking the five loaves and the two fish, he looked up to heaven, and blessed and broke the loaves, and gave them to the disciples, and the disciples gave them to the crowds.* ²⁰ *And all ate and were filled...* "

What are Jesus' values? For me, the values Jesus holds are very much the same as those we have articulated for Trinity UCC in these days. As we look to the future, indeed, as we seek to re-invent the alternative futures that will make Trinity UCC the church of the future, it is crucial that our values are in sync with those of the gospel of Jesus Christ. The story of Jesus feeding the 5,000 is a great test of the "in-syncness" of our values with those of Jesus. Indeed, if we just review this brief story of Jesus facilitating through the work of the disciples the feeding a huge crowd of hungry souls, we can test out this notion that our values are the same as those of Jesus.

- Jesus **Loves God** – no question about it; Jesus loves God so much that Jesus is like God, the God revealed to us by the life and teachings of Jesus
- Jesus always shows **Compassionate love of everyone** – in verse 14 of our text today, it says, “when he went ashore, he saw a great crowd; and he had compassion for them and cured their sick”
- Jesus **Welcomes everyone** – He doesn’t instruct the disciples to check for people’s ID cards to make sure they should be included; yes, seeks to save all people **“where they are”**
- Jesus feeds the 5,000 in order to show the disciples how to show their **Christian Discipleship and Service**
- Surely as the crowd gathered to listen to Jesus, they participated in **Inspiring worship** -- If Jesus was committed to anything at all, Jesus loved gathering with the people in preaching and in prayer. Let us call these actions ‘worship’, and yes, worshipping with Jesus has to be inspiring otherwise the people would not have followed him
- Jesus was **Committed to Community** – even in the face of his grief over the death of John the Baptist, he was committed to gathering people together, **where ever they were at the time**, in a community
- Jesus **Reached out to all generations** – in the 21st verse, the text says, “and those who ate were about five thousand men, besides women and children;” all were included
- Jesus came to bring **Peace and Justice** to the world – the ones who gathered that day by the lake shore and on the hillsides were poor and oppressed; Jesus fed them physical food in order to fill their stomachs and he brought them dignity and justice in the ways he fed them; and
- Jesus valued the sacred texts of the day (**Bible as the Foundation of our Faith** – in the preceding chapter (13:54-58) of Matthew, Jesus was in Nazareth. The text says, ⁵⁴ “He came to his hometown and began to teach the people^[a] in their synagogue, so that they were astounded and said, “Where did this man get this wisdom and these deeds of power? ⁵⁵ Is not this the carpenter’s son? Is not his mother called Mary? And are not his brothers James and Joseph and Simon and Judas? ⁵⁶ And

are not all his sisters with us? Where then did this man get all this?" 57 And they took offense at him. But Jesus said to them, "Prophets are not without honor except in their own country and in their own house." 58 And he did not do many deeds of power there, because of their unbelief."

You see, my friends, these nine values of Trinity UCC are the values Jesus lived by. I encourage as you read or hopefully re-read this sermon that you will open your own Bible to study this story of Jesus feeding the 5,000 and seek to think about your own values. What are your values? Write them down. How do your values jive with the nine values of Trinity UCC? of Jesus?

Let me turn now to the Vision Statement for Trinity UCC: **In ten years, TUCC will be a church that is a vibrant and diverse community of Christians that welcomes and seeks out people from all walks of life, and that supports the spiritual, physical, and emotional needs that challenge the community and its members.** Do you notice how the nine values are internally consistent with the Vision? This is the same for Jesus as seen through the lens of the story of the feeding of the 5,000 souls that day on the hillside.

Trinity's vision is indeed visionary. This vision not only implies its underlying assumption that we are not yet realizing or experiencing what the Vision Statement calls for in our life together. There is more to be done. There is more to happen in the life of our congregation that will bring this vision to fruition. This is always the case in bringing in God's reign into the world: Right Now, but NOT YET. This is a proactive vision: Trinity will be a church that **"seeks out people from all walks of life."** Just like Jesus, that means we go out looking for those with **"spiritual, physical, and emotional needs that challenge the community and its members."**

In closing, I might suggest that very often Jesus would go to a quiet place seeking some retreat and respite and the people would hear of his presence and come seeking him. But let me stake a strong position here and say that Jesus was known for his love, compassion, welcome and inclusion that people searched for him. What if Trinity UCC becomes known for our love, compassion, welcome and inclusion? And more importantly, known for our commitment to and engagement with the community by our seeking out those who "need the Lord"?

“They will know we are Christians by our love” and our mission:
TUCC exists to Love people where they are and encourage them to grow in their relationship with Jesus Christ.

May it be so for you and me and for the Trinity United Church of Christ in these days and beyond. This is the future we weave. Amen.