OT: Malachi 3:6-12

NT: 2 Cor 9:6-15

GSPL: John 6:1-13

Let’s open up with prayer. Gracious God, our heavenly Father, You have given us many blessings in our life. Those blessings are given to both care for us and to be used by us to care for others. Today open our hearts to learning more about how we can Share Christ in our SERVICE to others and with the Resources You have provided. You gave us the greatest gift in Your Son, Jesus who instructed us to love others as He loved us. Remind us and fill us with that love as we study together in our life groups. AMEN

 This Lesson is designed to help us focus on SHARING Christ with our SERVICE and RESOURCES. When we say SERVICE we are really thinking of ACTIONS, TIME, and TALENTS. We can SHARE Christ through our actions of service for others, in the time we spend with others, and by using our talents and strengths to lead and help others. God gives to us blessings so that we can be a blessing to others. Often times it is the SHARING of ONE PERSON that can truly impact a life for CHRIST.

 Throughout history there have been moments where the influence and power of ONE has made a big difference. Consider the stand of Martin Luther, or the work of Thomas Edison, the compassion of Mother Theresa, the boldness of Rosa Parks, or the leadership of General Patton or Douglass MacArthur.

 As I have studied these leaders and those who make such a powerful difference in the lives of others I have discovered one thing that they all have in common; That one thing is an unwavering conviction and passion that they can make a difference.

That belief, passion and conviction that says ‘my actions matter’ is what carries them over obstacles and drives them through adversity.

 So let me ask you, do you believe that you can make a difference? Even more appropriately let me ask it this way, “Do you believe that God can make a difference in this world in and through you?”

 In John chapter 6 we read,

***“Some time after this, Jesus crossed to the far shore of the Sea of Galilee (that is, the Sea of Tiberias), and a great crowd of people followed Him because they saw the signs He had performed by healing the sick. Then Jesus went up on a mountainside and sat down with His disciples. The Jewish Passover Festival was near. When Jesus looked up and saw a great crowd coming toward Him, He said to Philip, “Where shall we buy bread for these people to eat?” He asked this only to test him, for He already had in mind what He was going to do. Philip answered Him, “It would take more than half a year’s wages to buy enough bread for each one to have a bite!”***

 There is nothing more deadly to making a difference than discouragement.

Philip was OVERWHELMED BY THE NEED. He did some quick math and realized that the need was so big that it would demand over six month’s salary just to provide each person with one bite!

 Has that happened to you? You know what needs to be done but before you even get started walking towards the solution, you sigh and fall in defeat. You wonder how in the world your simple service from two hands and your simple resources could possibly make a difference. Despair can quickly derail and discourage even the most determined dreamers and difference makers.

 You may have heard the story of the starfish written by Loren C. Eiseley. A storm had swept thousands of starfish up on a beach. A man walking along that beach came upon a boy who was hurriedly tossing each starfish, one at a time, back into the ocean so they could live. Most of the other adults standing on the beach watched this little boy amused. But the man commented to the boy, “You know you will never save all these starfish. There are thousands of them. You can’t possibly make a difference.” At first the boy seemed deflated. (Wouldn’t you like to slap the dream killer?) Yet after a moment the simple faith of that boy kicked in, he reached down, grabbed another starfish and tossed it into the ocean saying, “Well I made a difference for this one.”

 Inspired the man began helping the boy to throw one starfish at a time back into the ocean. At the site of these two, the other adults were moved to join in and all the starfish were saved.

GRACEWORKS is an example of ONE PERSON who knew that ONE ACTION for ONE CHILD at a time could make a difference. It all started when a lady from our congregation stood at another shore of a devastating storm. That storm was in the form of a disease known as AIDS. She stood and began to recount the numerous names and faces that were missing from her community. Each of the missing had been killed by AIDS.

 Then she began to look into the eyes of those who remained. Her heart went out to the children of the missing ones. Here they were stranded up on the shore of this storm and their very survival was threatened. If she had stopped and considered how many in Africa had been orphaned and stranded she might have been overwhelmed and discouraged and lost count as the number climbed to over 14.8 million in Africa alone.

 But like the boy on the beach Susan Njemanze believed that she could make a difference to just one at a time. Graceworks had begun. Today Graceworks has grown from a few children to now making a difference in the lives of over 100 orphans.

 Her passion and conviction has inspired many including two other leaders in our community and St. John’s Family. **(Go to Jeff and Robin Lyall for Adults / Hanah Singer and Logan Grove for kids)**

 You know that is one example of how one person made a difference in one part of the world. Perhaps you are not on the ground in AFRICA…but where are you standing today? Are there needs around you? What ACTION could you take? What expertise or talent has God given you that could help someone else? What part of your finances can you give over to the LORD for the purposes of ministry?

In the Gospel it was one boy. He offered what he had and Andrew, Simon Peter’s brother, took that boy’s simple resource saying to Jesus,

 ***“Here is a boy with five small barley loaves and two small fish,***

then he added…

***but how far will they go among so many?”***

 Andrew’s question was directed to the ONLY ONE who can make such a difference in the face of overwhelming need. But notice that JESUS involves the BOYS resources, and the SERVICE of the disciples in meeting the need that day…

 ***Jesus said, “Have the people sit down.” There was plenty of grass in that place, and they***

 ***sat down (about five thousand men were there). Jesus then took the loaves, gave thanks,***

 ***and distributed to those who were seated as much as they wanted. He did the same with the***

 ***fish.***

 You see simple resources remain simple when they remain in our hands. But when placed in the hands of our Savior, they become mighty enough to meet any need.

So what is in your hands? What is in your heart? Simple resources? Simple Dreams? Simple passions? There is certainly no shortage of needs in our community and throughout our world. How can we make a difference?

 We can make a difference by SHARING Christ with our service and resources. We take them to the LORD and watch how He multiplies and feeds those who are hungry for help and healing.

What’s amazing when I consider that story is that we read in verse 6, ***He asked this only to test him, for He already had in mind what He was going to do.***

 Jesus already knew what He was going to do. Is there any reason to doubt that as Jesus points out the needs around us that He already has something in mind about meeting the need?

Even more amazing is that not only does Jesus test our faith to SHARE Him with those in need, but He invites us to TEST HIM!!

 In Malachi 3 God says, **“Bring the whole tithe into the storehouse, that there may be food in my house. Test me in this,” says the LORD Almighty, “and see if I will not throw open the floodgates of heaven and pour out so much blessing that there will not be room enough to store it.”**

 God invites us to TEST HIM to do what He already has in mind to do. He has in mind to do what He has always done. To heal, to feed and nourish, to care for emotionally, physically, and to save us from sin and death.

 We can take our simple resources and offer them from our hands back into the LORDS hands to watch them be used in ways we could never have foreseen. That starts each week as we bring our offerings to the LORD at worship. When we gather our offerings we are like the BOY placing part of our FINANCIAL RESOURCES into the hands of JESUS.

As we give we are also asked by the LORD to SERVE others. Like the disciples that means we are called into ACTION to distribute the blessings of God to all in need. There are many ministries both here on campus, and those focused off of our campus where your time, your talents could be used by the LORD to multiply the blessings to so many. Just ONE – JESUS, reaching through ONE – YOU to SHARE.

 We are blessed by God to be a blessing. And we’ve been saved to SHARE Christ with our service and resources.