

# How Can We Do It All?

John 6:1-14

By

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To the extent possible, effort has been made to preserve the quality of the spoken word in this written adaptation.

I invite you to ponder about a question that I think most adults, and increasingly more kids, ask themselves, “How Can We Do It All?” or “How Can I Possibly Do All I’m Supposed to Do?” One response is, “WE CAN’T!” I remember Gary Demarest telling about a conversation with a nurse who cared for children in Uganda after Idi Amin’s reign of terror, when there was such devastation. The needs were legion, and the little mission hospital could handle so few, compared with the enormity of needs. Gary asked her how she dealt with this. Her reply has stuck with me for decades, “These are the children God has entrusted to me, and they are mine to nurse to health. I trust God has called others to care for the rest.”

That Ugandan nurse reminds me of Mwawi, the Malawian nurse and clinical officer who directs Ministry of Hope’s Lilongwe Crisis Nursery and Mobile Medical Clinic. She’s amazing, as is Patrick who runs one of our other African mission partners, Discover the World’s Abandoned Baby Center. Patrick can comfort these destitute little ones so beautifully with the sound of his voice and soft comforting pats.

We can’t do it all. As was said in the charge to me at my ordination nearly 26 years ago: The need is not the call – God’s call is your call. Often our call is, as Frederick Buechner wrote and I prayed earlier, “Where our deep gladness meets the world’s deep hunger.”<sup>1</sup> That’s true for Mwawi and Patrick in Africa, and for Charlotte Van Fleet at Harambee in Pasadena, and Ann at Angel Interfaith Network and Chuck and Ruth and Marie with our Conversational English Class.

How about you? What’s your deep gladness? How does it intersect with the world’s deep hunger? We cannot do it all, but how do you and I do all that you and I are called to do? How can we do it all? Sometimes life seems like it would be better if we could just slow it down--get a hold of our situations. It’s like my friend Pam Powell, who preached my San Marino Community Church installation, says:

“A woman was driving across town and found herself trailing the same large truck. When the truck came to a stop light, the driver would open his door,

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<sup>1</sup> Buechner, Frederick, *Wishful Thinking: A Seeker’s ABC* HarperOne; Rev Exp edition (September 24, 1993)

reach over the seat to pick up a baseball bat, jump out of the cab and run around to the side of the truck—where he would frantically bang on the side of the truck with the bat. Then, when the light was beginning to change, he would run back to his cab, open the door, toss the bat on the seat, jump up, put the truck in gear and drive to the next light. At the next light the same thing happened—the driver would open his door, reach over the seat to pick up a baseball bat, jump out of the cab and run around to the side of the truck—where he would frantically bang on the side of the truck with the bat. The woman watched this with fascination. Finally, she resolved to find out what he was doing. So, on the third light—when he jumped out of the cab—she rolled down her window and shouted out to him, “I’ve been following you through these lights and every time you jump out and bang on that truck. What are you doing?” The truck driver lowered his bat, looked at the woman and shouted, “Lady, Ya’ see, I’ve got a two ton truck here—but I’m carrying four tons of canaries. So I have to keep two tons in the air at all times!”<sup>2</sup>

The truth is that sometimes we are afraid - especially since 9/11, things have changed, haven’t they? And if we’re honest, most of us would say that the future doesn’t seem to be as certain and clear as before. Sometimes, we are afraid that something will happen that will change everything for us. And sometimes, we feel afraid that our lives won’t make a difference. So, we confess that there are times when we wonder: How Can We Possibly Do It All - All We’re Supposed to Do? And then there’s the story in the Gospel of this boy with his lunch. His lunch! On the face of it, it’s almost laughable when you think about it. Do you remember being a kid with your lunchbox containing maybe something you really liked---like a Hostess cupcake or Twinkie? Do you remember how you wanted to be sure and eat your own lunch and not get tricked into trading it or completely losing it to another kid? Well, think about that.

Remember how you felt as a kid--because the Scripture says that this boy was not just a boy--he was a little boy. The Greek is in the diminutive. And guess what else? The word for fish is not fish like a filet of halibut--it is fish as in little bitty fishes, small like sardines or herring. The Greek says, “little fishes.” And the word for bread here is poor

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<sup>2</sup> A story sent to Rev. Berns via email

bread, barely bread --not the rich crusty bread from the bakery but thin bread. This little boy had a poor meal. He had enough to eat maybe for lunch and dinner but it was not fancy. So far as the text tells us there were no Hostess cupcakes in that meal.

So, there was this little boy-- with what amounts for us as a bologna sandwich with no cheese or mayonnaise. There he was and there were Jesus' disciples/apprentices, (as Dallas Willard calls them), trying to figure out how to feed 5,000 people - actually 5000 men, plus the accompanying women and children. Perhaps the youngster overheard them talking to Jesus. Jesus had said to the disciples, "You feed them." And the disciples were probably saying to themselves, "What is he thinking about? What does he mean? How are we possibly going to do all we're supposed to do? This is impossible! It would take at least a half-year's wages to do this!" That's always the question, isn't it, when you get right down to it: how are we going to pay for it? How are we possibly going to do it all - all we're supposed to do? It's just too much. It can't be done. It's impossible!

And so a little boy steps forward and tells Andrew, Peter's brother, that well, he has this lunch. No fair saying the boy wasn't hungry or he didn't like bologna sandwiches. He probably was as hungry as anybody there. We're safe assuming that. He offers his lunch: a couple of fishes (and I don't mean a dozen 40 pound tunas) and a bit of pretty ordinary bread. "I've got this," he said, "You could have it." Pretty amazing, eh? Martin Luther said people have to go through three Christian conversions: heart, mind, and pocketbook. Our Fall study and stewardship emphasis, Renovation of the Heart, which folks are reading and discussing in small groups and welcoming weekly classes, says that the transformation affects our hearts, minds, bodies, relationships, and our souls. Luther said, heart, mind, pocketbook or we could say, wallet or checkbook or investments or property. In today's scripture, it was heart, mind, and lunch!

But what is more amazing is that Andrew was so desperate that he even mentioned it to Jesus. Now, think about this. You are being asked to provide food for 5,000 plus people without a Visa card and no restaurant delivery. Andrew was flat-out desperate but that's understandable. We can get that way ourselves when we really need a miracle in our lives. Don will readily tell you that I do get that frantic and desperate. Have you ever experienced such desperation?

Andrew did the right thing, he mentioned it to Jesus. Works for us, too! (That's prayer!) So, they sat down and Jesus blessed that little lunch and they all ate. "What?," we say to ourselves. "What?" They all ate from a couple of little fishes and some barley rolls that Jesus blessed? Yes, that's what the Bible says. Something profound is going on here - something important to understand. There was a need felt by a great number of people. One small boy made a small contribution. Jesus blessed it and there was an astonishing multiplication of the gift. Everyone was blessed. One boy. One lunch offered to Jesus.

So, how can we possibly do it all - all we're supposed to do? The first thing to do is check out what we've got. Well, we say, it's pretty tight right now in the ole checkbook. Yes, I know. Did you know that the average American family lives on 105% of their income a year? Did you know that the average American family has about \$11,000 in debt outside of mortgage and car? It's tight, you say. I know. But remember that 1 billion people today live on \$1/day or less. We're rich! And two or more billion people live on just \$2 /day. We're wealthy. You've likely heard these statistics: If you make \$24,000/year, you and I are over the ninetieth percentile of wealth. If you have access to \$80,000 a year, you are in the top one percent of wealth in our world. We really are very rich! <sup>3</sup>

So, what if we think of it as just one lunch? That's the key. One lunch at IN-N- OUT is about \$5.00 – that's a #2 – I have mine Protein-style, no onions. Most of us could probably afford to increase our giving to the church by one lunch's worth a week. Do you think it won't matter if you increase your gift to the church by \$5.00 or a lunch's worth a week? Think again. If you're faithful with that commitment, it amounts to \$260 or more per year that you have given to the ministry of Christ at SMCC. If ten of you decide to do that, it means \$2,600 more per year. If a hundred of you do it, it means \$26,000 more per year. If 100 of you do that, and 100 of you begin to give for the first time at just \$5 a week, it amounts to \$52,000.

Of course, if you same 100 people give \$10 a week, instead of lunch at say, Fresh Gourmet, and the second 100 people, who've never given before, give \$10 a week, the church would have \$104,000 a year increase --more to do ministry among the

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<sup>3</sup> Orberg, Rev. John, , From 2011 Sermon, Menlo Park Presbyterian Church, CA

congregation and reach out to the community and to the world. Friends, I'm talking about \$10 a week more. It's a couple of cheap lunches. It's a large popcorn and couple of sodas at the movies. It's a couple of magazines that you didn't read anyway, when all was said and done.

God takes that stuff that we have in our hands, our lunch bags, and the Lord is so great that He even uses our spare change, and God makes miracles. And imagine if you gave up a lunch each week at Julianne's? \$15/week, if you just drink water. Then San Marino Community Church would have \$156,000 more for ministry and mission!

Now, let me ask you something? Do you think that boy's life was ever the same after that? After he saw what his initiative and his generosity and his love could do? I don't think he was ever the same after that. I think he walked away empowered and confident, joyful with his eyes shining with faith. He walked away a boy believing that miracles could happen and he could be a part of it.

How can we possibly do it all - all we're supposed to do? It turns out to be not as hard as we thought. We check out what we've already got - which is really a lot! We make a deliberate commitment to give it to Jesus, even if it's small, just a lunch's worth, and then, we get to see it happen. We get to see the miracle - and we are never the same again. Mother Teresa once said, "We can not do great things, only small things with great love."<sup>4</sup>

Let's together join with Jesus and make a great thing happen at San Marino Community Church. Let's make this Stewardship Commitment one that will be talked about for the next 70 years and the rest of the history of this church. And we'll be able to say, we were a part of that.

We were able to do it all - all that we were supposed to do - with God's help. AMEN.

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<sup>4</sup> Mother Teresa, Inspirational Quotes: [www.brainyquote.com/quotes/authors/m/mother\\_teresa.html](http://www.brainyquote.com/quotes/authors/m/mother_teresa.html)Cached - Similar