

SERMON
First Lutheran Church
Aitkin, Minnesota

Mark 6:1-29
Rev. Darrell J. Pedersen
January 31, 2016

CHILDREN'S MESSAGE

Good morning kids. Welcome to worship here at First Lutheran Church. **Nineteen Beanie Babies** showed up to join us for worship this morning. A nice fellow gave them to me and asked that I make sure that you kids each receive one. This fellow loves kids and tries to make sure that all kids can have a nice life. He is also excited to make sure that you kids know about how much Jesus loves you.

Our friend is hoping that there will be enough Beanie Babies so that everyone can have one to take home. If we don't have enough, some of you will have to volunteer not to get one; maybe let the littler kids have one.

Jesus has something that he wants to give to every one of you too. Do you know what that is? **Beanie Babies**? Maybe. But for sure, Jesus wants to make sure that **every one of you**, and **every one of your parents**, and every one of your **grandparents**, and **every person here**, and **every person in the world** gets this special gift from God.

Somebody brought you here today right? That person wanted to make sure that you were able to receive a **Beanie Baby** right? No. They wanted to make sure that you **receive Jesus**. They wanted to make sure that you **know how much God loves you**. They wanted to make sure that you know that

- Jesus goes with you wherever you go,
- Jesus loves and cares for you every day,
- You can always count upon Jesus to help you when you are in trouble, afraid or sad,
- You can always count upon Jesus to be with you no matter what.

Beanie Babies are a nice gift. Jesus is the best gift of all. Thanks to the nice person who gave us the Beanie Babies. Thanks to God for giving us Jesus. **We may run out of Beanie Babies to give away. But we will never run out of Jesus.** God will see to that. Thanks be to God. Amen.

ADULT MESSAGE

God has a mission. God has a church.
We are God's church in mission.

Thirty years ago, Pastor Albert Schmidt told of his experience. He called it:

52 Pennies Plus Love

His name was Johnnie Evans. I had been the instrument of his emergency Baptism as he lay in an incubator. They said there was little hope for him. God's gifts of grace, faith and sheer determination proved them wrong.

In his 33 years of life on this earth, John endured over 200 surgeries. Yet, he was an inspiration to many, a counselor to his peers and a minister to this ordained minister.

When he was 11, they amputated both of his legs to the knee. While he was recovering in the hospital, we were busy on a fund campaign for our new sanctuary. I visited him in the children's hospital shortly after surgery.

We made some small talk. Then he asked me, "Pastor, how much is that new church going to cost?"

This one, whose mouth often engages before his brain, replied, "About a quarter of a million – 250 thousand dollars." His face dropped beneath his wheelchair.

Recovering, I said, "But, Johnnie, no one is going to write us out a check for that amount. It will be paid for by people who give whatever loving gifts they can." His face beamed as he related the following to me:

"I formed a club at the hospital. We call ourselves the Surgical Half-wits. I got myself elected as president. I told my friends about the new church. We took an offering."

With that he held out his hand and dropped into mine 52 of the sweatiest, grimiest, most beautiful pennies you've ever seen. "Give it to the new church," he said.

I turned away. It's not good to see a grown preacher cry. Then I kissed him on the cheek and said, "**God bless you and all the Surgical Half-wits.**"

The next Sunday I shared the story of Johnnie and his pennies with the congregation, who had been diligent in prayer for him. I think I am safe to say that all my stewardship sermons and lessons laid end to end were not as effective as Johnnie's story of stewardship lived out. It became a rallying point of motivation and inspiration to us.

That's why I say, "**Fifty-two pennies plus love equals a new sanctuary.**"

(From "Tapestry – An Anthology of stories in celebration of the mission and ministry of The American Lutheran Church, Augsburg, Minneapolis, 1985.)

Dear Friends in Christ, God has a **mission**. God has a **church**. We are **God's Church in mission**. If we are faithful in carrying out God's mission here at First Lutheran Church in Aitkin, Minnesota, United States of America, Planet Earth:

- Every kid/person/family will know –
 - A. **God is constantly and forever loving and caring for them** no matter what good or terrible things happen in their lives.
 - B. **God is moving in and through them** to love and care for the neighbor and the world.
- This faith family is **reaching out to the neighbor and to the world** beyond –
 - A. **Not to get money** in the offering plate,
 - B. Not so that people **never make mistakes** or get into trouble,
 - C. Not even so that people can **go to heaven**,
 - D. **But**, so that every person **might know, trust and live daily in Jesus' love and care**, now and **forever**.

This is what God wants for **you and for me**, for **my kids** and for yours, and for **every person** in this big old world.

- No one should ever have to **live, or die** without knowing **Jesus has a good firm, loving hold on them**.

- No one should ever have to live, or die without having a good firm, loving hold on Jesus.

In our Gospel text for today, Jesus, for the first time, sends out his handful of followers on God's mission to their world. There are some basic truths in this text.

- God's mission for us always starts with us gathered around Jesus.
- Here Jesus embraces, forgives, feeds, heals, teaches and enlivens his people,
- Then Jesus provides us with everything we will need,
- Then Jesus sends us out to love, share good news, heal and invite others to come on back home with us.
- Finally we come back to Jesus to be fed, healed, enlivened and sent all out, again and again, week after week, year after year, until our last day and the great family reunion in heaven.

Someone forwarded a current song called, "Be Humble and Kind." It is by Tim McGraw. It seems to me that he, along with the photos provided by Opra Winfrey gives us a pretty good glimpse of God's world and of the attitude we should have toward God's world. As you watch, please remember that God loves every person you see. Please remember that Jesus died and rose again for every person you see.

(Please play song.)

God has a mission.

God has a church.

We are God's Church in Mission to God's World.

God bless us in mission today and always.

Thanks be to God.

Amen.