

## **We Were Hungry, We Were Thirsty: A Table for Service - [Luke 9:10-17](#)**

Norwalk Christian Church, October 21., 2018, Come to the Table Series, Non-lectionary, Proper 24, Year B

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A while back, Eric Niessen, the Director of Student Services for Norwalk Schools, and Holy Sealine, our City Library director, approached the Ministerial Association about a need. There were parents of English language learners in our school system who, themselves, wanted to learn English. They were all women, all refugees from Somalia, and all living in Norwalk.

These parents wanted to be able to talk to their kid's teachers, help with their homework, talk to the doctor at Unity Point or the cashier at Fareway. They wanted to be--well, like every other resident of Norwalk. But they work long days, and can't make it to the adult English language learning programs in Des Moines. They needed something in town. The school didn't know what to do. The library didn't know what to do. But something needed to be done.

After learning about this need, I shared it with our church Outreach Committee. Here's what could've happened: we could've said a prayer for these women. "God, please help them learn English." We could've complained to Eric or Holly--you really should be doing something to help them! We could've waited for another church to respond.

But, you know what did happen? These leaders said, "We got some flexible time on our hands. Maybe we could do something?"

And that's what they did. Now, 2-4 times a week, our church members are in our church basement, with refugee women from Somalia living in Norwalk, teaching them English.

It's really incredible what they have created, and never in my ministry life have I been more proud of a group of church leaders living out God's call on their lives.

And I have a question for you: What does this story have to do with today's Gospel?

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Seven years ago, there was a group of faith leaders, all a part of congregations that are members, like we are, of AMOS. They were having house meetings--small group conversations--in their congregations and neighborhoods. In these conversations, they kept hearing stories about people needing jobs.

On one hand, they'd hear about an employer who had jobs available, but then, the people who needed a job didn't have the skills necessary to apply.

And here's what could've happened. These leaders could've led a prayer: Dear God, send these people jobs. They could've wrote a letter to the Governor: You need to do something about these people not having jobs!

But you know what they did? They organized people together who needed jobs, learned what the obstacles were. They sat down with employers, and learned with their struggles were with finding good employees. And they created Project Iowa, a job-skills program that addressed the gaps between good workers and good jobs.

And in the 7 years since Project Iowa has been in place, they have trained over 1,000 workers in Central Iowa for good, well-paying, family wage jobs that actually exist.

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I could tell more stories. Like about the church that started a lunchtime Bible study to help build community among business professionals who struggled to find community and time to devote to their spiritual growth.

There's church we attended in New Orleans, who created a women's and children's shelter. They learned that single, homeless moms and moms feeling violence with their children had no place to go in the city. So they created Hagar's House in the old church parsonage.

Or the elder at the church I served in Abilene, who felt the church should be praying for our members more, so he started a weekly prayer group. Or the group of Disciples leaders who believed an innovative, downtown Disciples church was needed in Des Moines, which had a primary mission of reaching out to LGBTQ+ people who had been harmed in the past by the church, and so they created Downtown Disciples, our region's new church start that is still going strong for over 4 years.

By now, you're probably ready to ask me, those are great stories, What does any of this have to do with today's Gospel?

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I guess I should tell you the story of this time Jesus--sort of against his will, really--was surrounded by a huge crowd of people--adults, children. He was tired. He needed some spiritual renewal time. But the people needed him.

So for most of the day, he preached to them about the Kingdom of God--talked to them about what the world should be like. And to show them what it could look like, he healed people from their sickness. He laid hands on them. Showed them unconditional love. And the people--they couldn't leave. The more time with Jesus, the better.

But, well, it was getting late. And they were in a deserted place. That means there were no corner shops serving dinner. No markets. It was late. There was no food. And the people were hungry.

Jesus' disciples were perceptive; they saw the need. But unlike the stories I told you earlier, they didn't do a-thing about it. Instead, they talked about it. "Man, I wish Jesus would have stopped preaching earlier. How are we going to feed these people? They really should've planned better, brought a lunch or something. But now that they're hungry, they're going to turn on us. Somebody should do something!"

Then they went over to Jesus, and said, "Jesus! The people are hungry. You really should do something about this, Jesus." But Jesus said to them the same thing Jesus said to everyone of the people in the stories I told earlier, from our Outreach committee to the leaders of AMOS, to that church in New Orleans, and the Downtown Disciples--do something!

You give them something to eat!

"But we don't have enough food, Jesus." "Well, what do you have?" "Five loaves and two fish." "Now we're talking. Tell them to sit down."

Luke doesn't tell us where the five loaves and two fish came from. The gospel of John says it was given by a boy. Regardless of where the 5 loaves and 2 fish came from--every account of this story says the same: everyone ate, with baskets-full of leftovers.

How? I don't know. Maybe everyone was secretly hoarding their food, and when they saw the generosity of the boy, they decided to should share. I like to believe that Jesus just started miraculously pulling loaf after loaf after fish after fish out of a basket, until there was more than enough for all.

However it happened, though, it all began with what was in their hands already? And from there, Jesus took their gift, blessed it, and multiplied it.

Do you want to know what the kingdom of God looks like? It looks like a boy giving his lunch to feed others. It looks like people, taking what they have, and following Jesus as they create ELL programs for refugee women, create a women's and children's shelter, start a new church for LGBTQ+ people. This is the kingdom of God.

Our worship series is entitled: *Come to the Table*. But today, the table we are invited to is different than what we are often used to. At the table today, we are not the guests, but the hosts. We are not invited to be served, but to serve.

For we were hungry, we were thirsty, and Christ welcomed us to the table and fed us. And he's given us this table: so that we can be fed, yes. But also, so we can feed as we have been fed. This is a table for service. You give them something to eat.

So, I have one more question for you: What does this Gospel story have to do with your life? What have you been given? What is Jesus asking *you* to do?