

N is for Needs (met)

Isaiah 49:8-13 (*The Message*); John 6:1-13

Delivered by Rev. Tim Tiffany for Vista La Mesa Christian Church (Disciples of Christ),
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When you can do anything you want, anything at all, what will you do? It is coming, you know; that time when things look better and brighter. So what will you do? Dine out. Have friends over. Attend a play or concert or baseball game. It's coming, and I'll bet everybody has something planned for when we can do anything we want, anything at all.

Ruth and I are planning trips. One for 2022 will be to Bangkok, Ankor Wat, and Vietnam. Vietnam...where Hanh lives in a poor rural village northwest of Hanoi about 135 miles. One hundred seventy families live in Trung Ha Commune. You've been to Hanh's village; you just don't know it. You and I have been there because Week of Compassion has been there.

Hygiene facilities were almost non-existent in the village; few people knew about the healthiness of regular hand washing. Hanh had never even seen a toilet. In September of 2018 Church World Service began supporting latrine and water supply improvements for the school Hanh attends. Now Hanh and her classmates take delight in drinking from clean water taps and using modern latrines. The children are learning how these conveniences lead to better hygiene and better health. Hanh's mom, Tiep, joined community information sessions and learned about good sanitation and hygiene, including the importance of washing hands with clean water. Tiep signed up to install a biosand water filter and latrine in her home. Now she and Hanh have clean water to drink at home and a safe, clean place to relieve

themselves. And you made it possible through Week of Compassion whose mission is to provide relief, refugee assistance, and development through partnerships like the one with Church World Service that improved the lives and health of Hanh and the people of Trung Ha Commune.

God says in Isaiah 49 *“I form you and use you to reconnect the people with me, to put the land in order, to resettle families on the ruined properties.”* Just as in the days of Isaiah, so it is now: God is using us to reconnect, to reconcile creation. The work God is doing, will do, will be done through people just like you and me---simple folk, ordinary people doing extraordinary things together with God.

Such as the work of opening an open-air restaurant on a hillside by the Sea of Galilee. It was made possible by a young boy whose mother had packed him a sack lunch and sent him off to hear a man named Jesus. Now the story of the feeding of the 5,000 appears in all four gospels but only in John does the kid with a sack lunch appear.

When I was a child that was the version of the story I preferred. I could see me in the story. When I spent time on my grandparent’s farm in northeast Oklahoma my grandmother would sometimes send me off to explore the surrounding fields and hillsides with a Mason jar of sweet ice tea and cheese and crackers. Without a television and before laptops, I could spend hours by myself wandering here-and-there, and, with just a little alteration in the menu, I could see me being the boy on that hillside near the Sea of Galilee.

Five thousand men---and how many more women and children?---fed because one little boy, 8 or 9 or 10, offered his lunch of fishes and bread. It would have been easy for the child to have remained silent. “What good could my sack lunch do in the face of so many people?” he might have thought. “I’ll just keep it for myself. I’m just a little boy.”

Reminds me of another story of another boy. Only this story unfolded in the midst of the current pandemic that has robbed us globally of two-and-a-half million neighbors and torn at the very fabric of society. And this boy wasn’t 8 or 9 or 10; he was nearly 100. His name was Tom. After his wife died, Tom Moore moved to Marston Moretaine, an English village of about 4,500 people, there to live with his younger daughter, Hannah, and her family. He was about eighty-six then, and he remained very active riding his motorcycle here-and-there in the County of Bedfordshire. Then, at ninety-eight, Tom fell and broke his hip. A walker became his primary mode of transportation. At some point afterward, his family challenged him to walk the entire length of their 82-foot driveway. Tom did it, and so his son-in-law encouraged him to keep going, promising to pay one pound for every lap of driveway and garden, suggesting a goal of 100 laps by Moore’s 100th birthday. Captain Tom Moore, who fought in Burma during World War II, took up the challenge. He thought it would be good to raise \$1,364 for the doctors and nurses who had cared for him after he broke his hip. Long story short, word got out of **“Captain Tom’s 100th birthday walk for the National Health Service”** in Britain. Donations poured in from across the commonwealth and from as far away as the United States and Japan. Tom’s birthday walks raised \$40 million! Queen Elizabeth II knighted him last July in a socially

distanced ceremony at Windsor Castle. The queen used an extra long sword to confer the honor as Captain Tom Moore leaned on his walker.

Tom didn't ask whether the people who would benefit from all the donations had voted for Brexit or against it. He didn't check on skin color or national origin or sexual orientation. He didn't seem to care whether they were members of the Conservative or Labour political parties. He saw a hurt and tried to fix it, saw suffering and tried to heal it by doing his little part.

Have you read the Mission Statement of Vista La Mesa Christian Church lately? It says our mission is:

- To share the joy of God's love
- To nurture one another to wholeness
- To motivate each other to Christian witness
- To effect healing in a hurting world

It seems to me that much of that mission statement is about **letting love flow**---our Week of Compassion theme for 2021. When we give to such an offering as Week of Compassion we are sharing God's love through the hands of those working on our behalf around the world. We are nurturing and motivating one another to wholeness and witness. We are effecting healing in this hurting world in states and countries from A-Z, from Alabama to Zimbabwe---33 states, 36 countries---providing

- Covid-19 relief
- Hurricane and fire relief
- Women's empowerment
- Food security

- Refugee support

Amazing miracles because the Compassionate One calls you and me to do our little part, “to reconnect the people” with God and we respond. We say, “Yes.” Just like that young boy on the hillside long ago said “Yes.” Just like Captain Tom said, “Yes”

If you look at John’s account of the feeding of the 5,000, there is one sentence that John left out that I think is important to include in. If you look at the passage in Matthew 14 or Mark 6 or Luke 9, the disciples come to Jesus concerned that it’s getting late and people are getting hungry. Truth be told, it was probably the disciples who were getting hungry. In any case, they came to Jesus and said, “Send the crowd away, so that they may go in to the surrounding villages and countryside to lodge and get provisions.” (Luke 9:12) Send ‘em away. It’s “we time.” What was his response? Jesus said simply, “You give them something to eat.” The disciples were incredulous. “You give them something to eat.” Jesus was inviting the disciples to be part of the miracle.

We are invited to be part of the miracle, too. Our \$5 or \$10 or \$50 offering for Week of Compassion may seem like a drop in the bucket compared to the needs far and wide, great and small. I know I can’t do it alone. You can’t. But we can. We can be God’s instruments to meet the needs of our neighbors. If the human family is to endure in these times the needs of people we will never meet must be met with empathy and compassion. We may not be able to go to Vietnam right now. But we can go to Vietnam and Virginia, to Nicaragua and North Carolina, to Istanbul and Illinois, to the

Ukraine and Utah---meeting the needs of our brothers and sisters---by letting love flow through us. May it be so, dear Lord, may it be so. Amen.

If you wish to donate to Week of Compassion, go to WEEK OF COMPASSION, P. O. Box 1986, Indianapolis, IN 46206 or go online to WEEKOFCOMPASSION.org or give through your local congregation at www.vlmcc.org.