



UNITED THANK OFFERING

Ofrenda Unida de Accion de Gracias

Sample Sermon on the United Thank Offering: Using the Loaves and Fishes Gospel

125 years ago in the Episcopal Church there was a great need for funding for mission. The Church was expanding as the United States was expanding westward. Clergy were sent west without funding to build churches or to support their ministry, it was an exciting and a challenging time in the life of the church. It would have been easy for the church to stop growing, to get stuck in the mire of scarcity thinking, but this isn't what happened.

At this time during the life of the church, when General Convention met, the women met separately in their own meeting. The women worked together as a group known as the Women's Auxiliary of The Episcopal Church. These women had been doing box ministries for many years. "Box ministry" was when the women would collect boxes of goods to send to those in need, either in their own community or in the communities that were expanding to the west. When the women heard of the continued need, they took a collection among themselves to fund mission. The first collection allowed them to build a church in Anvik, Alaska and send a woman to be a missionary in Japan. The women of the church, in that first collection of funds for mission, gave out of their scarcity, but also out of an abundance of their faith.

Abundance often comes out of scarcity when we are faithful.

When we look at the gospel lesson regarding loaves and fishes, regardless of which gospel we are reading it from, we are asked to examine the faith of the disciples. Once again, the disciples operate out of their own anxiety, fear and scarcity. They see what is lacking...so many people and not very much food, only enough for themselves. They ask Jesus to send the people away so they can feed themselves. Jesus is clear – you give them something to eat. The only variation, which makes this idea so much more important is in the Gospel of Luke when a small boy is asked to give up his meal to feed the crowd. I don't know about all of you, but I cannot imagine the faith it took of that boy to give up his food since every young boy or teenager I've ever known seems to be always hungry.

The same is true today; Jesus is asking us to feed people instead of sending them away. Jesus shows the disciples and the crowd what God can do with a little offering and an abundance of faith.

Since that first collection 125 years ago, Episcopalians have given small offerings in thanksgiving for the blessings of our daily life into the famous Blue Box of the United Thank Offering. A penny for a parking space, a quarter for health restored, a dime for a good day at school are all signs of thankfulness regardless of their amount or size. After 125 years of coins given as a thankful response to the blessings of God, the United Thank Offering has raised and given away \$133 million.

The United Thank Offering is a sign that abundance comes out of scarcity. The women who first gave their thank offerings were doing it out of the allowance they were given to manage their households. Today, children contribute out of their allowance and adults out of their hard earned paycheck. It is an

offering above and beyond the tithe of 10% that God asks of each of us, it is an extra offering to give thanks for the goodness of God and the blessings of each day. It is the willingness to hand over everything we have to Jesus so he can bless it and share it among the masses.

The United Thank Offering is a discipline but it's also a lifestyle. How different would our communities be if we had to pay attention to all of the good things that are happening instead of the bad? You can use your Blue Box to give thanks, but you can also use it to offer up a prayer for others. If when you are watching the news you find you are overwhelmed by the statistics regarding teenagers, put a coin in your box, because it will become afterschool programs, gardens to supply food pantries and weekend programs. Overwhelmed by violence in Africa? Put a coin in your box, God will bless it and it will become a school in Liberia, farming in the Sudan and healthcare in Ghana.

The United Thank Offering has been funding for 125 years innovative mission and ministry that the church doesn't have the money to fund. It takes our small offerings of coins in a box, blesses them and then sends them out as a sign of our love and God's blessings to others. It is always a sign of abundance and faith. Coins in a box which are given in our own sense of scarcity or fear to overcome the problems of the world join together to become an abundance of solutions. A few fish, some bread are blessed and feed the multitudes, likewise your coins and mine are blessed and feed the world.