

Do it for Jesus  
Matthew 25:31-40  
Rev. Valerie Fairchild

Let us pray  
Lord, we welcome you. Come, speak to us. We don't  
want to miss your word for us today. Amen.

I grew up in a poor home. I didn't fully realize it at the time. My mother did a great job of covering over the things we lacked. We only ate meat twice a week. She simply couldn't afford more. On Sunday nights we ate popcorn and chocolate pudding for dinner. Mother told us how lucky we were to have a mom who would let us have popcorn for dinner, and we agreed. One night a week we had pancakes. Again, we were told how lucky we were to have breakfast for dinner. We had no idea it was because she couldn't afford to feed us better.

The worst was left over nights. Nothing was ever thrown away. So, over the course of a week or two, every bit of food left from dinner went into mason jars and into the refrigerator. On left over nights, my mother took all those jars, removed the lids, and put them in the oven to warm the food. No microwave. Do you remember left overs before microwaves? The stuff was dried out and yucky. Mother pulled each jar out and carefully divided the contents onto our plates – nothing wasted. We might

get two bites of one thing and four of another and none of it was any good in my humble childhood memory.

And then there was the spoiled cottage cheese that mother would sugar so we'd eat it, because nothing was thrown away.

But I didn't go to bed hungry.

Girls were required to wear dresses to school in those days – even in Flagstaff in the snow. I had two dresses and a girl scout uniform. I wore one on Monday and Tuesday, my scout uniform on Wednesday, and the second dress on Thursday and Friday. And, by the way, these were hand-me-downs from my older sisters.

But I had clothes.

At Christmas we got a new pair of pajamas and replacement toothbrushes and other essentials. I didn't really realize the lack until I returned to school and the teachers invited children to share what they got for Christmas. One after the other rattled off their list of amazing toys. When I named pajamas, the kids laughed. That was my first inkling that others had more. (When I became a teacher, I never let the children share what they received in class that way.)

I had a home. We lived in government subsidized low income housing. My sisters shared one room and my mother and I the other. I was sheltered from the snow and had a bed to sleep in. That was more than I saw in India.

Our trip to India really opened my eyes to severe poverty. A member of the church my husband served invited us to visit his home town in India. He didn't tell us anything about what we would see. He said he wanted to share his ministry.

We were in northern India which is predominantly Hindu, and next Muslim and less than 1% Christian. Our friend was born into the lowest caste and was fortunate enough to be taken into a Christian school where he received an education. He came to the United States where he became a very successful entrepreneur. Each year he took his funds and went back to India to try to help others like himself.

We visited many of the schools which are supported by donations to educate the lower caste children who would not otherwise go to school. It was what we saw out on the streets that broke our hearts. Little hovels and cardboard shelters were everywhere, and children ran about in rags and dug through the trash. Everywhere we went the children begged.

Our car was stopped at a red light and little girl, maybe four or five, began doing flips and tricks in the intersection and then ran and placed her little face against our car window before the light changed. Our friend explained that she was probably the primary bread winner for her family and that when she was no longer young enough and cute enough to

cause people to empty their pockets, she would most likely be sold for sex.

What I experienced growing up was wealth compared to the children of India. We left India happy to sponsor six girls in school and wishing we could do more.

When we haven't seen or experienced true poverty ourselves, it is hard to understand just how much need there is. We might see homeless people hanging out in a Phoenix park as we drive around, but we don't really see what it is like for them to live without even the basics we take for granted. We might have experienced being sent to bed without dinner once or twice as a child when we got in trouble, but most of us haven't experienced missing meal after meal. We might experience the water turned off while the RO is being serviced, but we've filled a pitcher of water that sits in the refrigerator or we reach for a soda or bottled ice tea. We might have grown up with hand-me-downs, but few of us were ever dressed in filthy rags pulled from a trash pile. Maybe we camped out and slept on the hard ground in our warm sleeping bag at some time, but we don't know what its like to sleep out night after night without even a blanket or pillow.

Sadly, one of the greatest growth indicators in America is the underclasses, those who are desperately poor. Yes, we read about those growing richer and stockpiling their millions. But the destitute

who do without the barest essentials are increasing in number at an alarming rate. This is across all ethnic lines. There are more abandoned babies with AIDS, homeless school age children, extended families of 20 crammed into one-room apartments, and elderly men and women trying to choose between medication and food.

The needs in this world are great.

In the West Virginia hills there was a practice of setting an empty chair at the Thanksgiving table. It was a reminder that no matter how many people were already present, there was always room for one more. Even if there wasn't physically an "empty chair," there was an extra plate and extra portions of food in case an unexpected visitor showed up.

The tradition of the empty chair is also a part of the Jewish thanksgiving feast--the Passover Seder. An empty chair is placed at the Seder table in the hopes that Elijah will join in the feast. It was prophesied that when Elijah returned the Christ would follow.

Thankfully, we know that Jesus has come, and we don't need an empty chair to represent our hope in the Savior. However, there is something about the tradition of the empty, expectant chair, that might help us remember those we can help feed. The chair can help us spiritually to stop and see and remember that we are incredibly blessed while many are doing without. It can help us remember that we can,

physically or through acts of love, make room for more at our table.

Is there a limit to the amount of love we can give, or the bounty we can share, or the fellowship we can extend? We find room for one more holiday party, one more piece of chicken, one more car parked in the garage, one more present hidden in the hall closet, one more charge on the credit card, one more outfit or pair of shoes, one more Starbucks coffee, one more dinner at the restaurant, one more movie at the theater...

Yet, we say we have no room to visit one more lonely person, or write one more encouraging note, or volunteer one more hour at a mission, or let one more person into our heart.

And Jesus taught that whatever we do for one of the least of his brothers and sisters, we do for him. What would it take for us to learn to see Jesus in all those who are wanting?

We love to focus on what we don't have. We don't have the newest and greatest and best and most up-to-date whatever. Poor us. Maybe we need to open our eyes and see again all the amazing blessings we *do* have. Compared to many, my childhood was blessed!

Henry Ward Beecher wrote, "If one should give me a dish of sand and tell me there were particles of iron in it, I might look for them with my eyes and search for them with my clumsy fingers and

be unable to detect them; but let me take a magnet and sweep through it and now would it draw to itself the almost invisible particles by the mere power of attraction.

“The *unthankful* heart, like my fingers in the sand, discovers no mercies; but let the *thankful* heart sweep through the day and as the magnet finds the iron, so it will find in every hour, some heavenly blessings. Only the iron in God's sand is gold!”

We are rich with God's blessings and our blessings are meant to be shared.

Sometimes our eyes are opened when we experience a little bit of what others face daily. That is what the Matthew 25 Challenge is all about. It is based on today's scripture message. Each day you'll receive a few short text messages that, coupled with the day's challenge, will, prayerfully, increase your awareness of your blessings and your ability to bless others.

I pray each of us will experience a transformation in our faith. I pray we'll understand the heart of God more and how we can *do for him* by doing for others. At this time, we'll pass out the challenge cards for this week. I invite you to place this on your refrigerator to remind you daily. I encourage you to accept this six-day challenge and invite God to work in your heart. If you need to modify something or switch days because of your

schedule, do it. But don't opt out. If you miss a day, ok. But don't opt out.

\*\*\* Watch this video and see how others have been impacted by the challenge.

Now, take out your phones. Let's all do this. It's just six days. Go to messaging. Type 44888 into the line where you would normally put someone's phone number. Now in the space where you'd type a message, simply type M25. That's it. You're in. Indicate you want to begin Mar. 4 and your zip code and the fun begins!

Remember, John and Karol have completed the challenge. If you have questions talk to them. They shared that the messages are short and well done and meaningful.

Let me know by email your experience with this. Next week we'll celebrate together the completion of this challenge.

May God bless you with godly insight and a heart that, like the Grinches', grows three times larger for the least of these brothers and sisters this week!

Let us pray

Lord, pull us out of our comfort zone. Help us to live in your Spirit and not by our fleshly desire to put ourselves first. Open our hearts to your message for us through this challenge this week. We want to grow closer to you! Amen.