

SERMON- PASTORAL REFLECTIONS FOR STEWARDSHIP SUNDAY
– MAY 4, 2008

At the beginning of the sixteenth century, when the Jews were expelled from Spain, they went all over- France, Germany, Greece. Some went to the holy land. Among them was Jacobi. He was a shoemaker by trade, a round man with a round face, a round body. He was even a little bow-legged. A kind man. But the thing that everybody said about Jacobi was that he was so devout.

He would go to the synagogue every Sabbath and listen intently to what the rabbi was saying, and that was odd because Jacobi spoke Spanish and the rabbi spoke Hebrew. But still he'd screw up his face and listen and listen, trying catch every word.

On one Sabbath the rabbi gave a sermon, and in it he mentioned how twelve loaves of bread were offered to God when the Holy Temple was still in Jerusalem. Jacobi understood the word "bread" and he understood "God." He got so excited he ran home to his wife. "Esperanza," he said, "guess what I found out? God eats bread! You are the best baker in the whole country. Make a pan de Dios this week and I'll bring it to God."

That week Esperanza kneaded in the best ingredients, put in her best intentions, and braided the bread with love. The next week Jacobi proudly carried his loaves to the synagogue. "Senor Dios," he said when he entered, "I've got your bread. You'll see, you'll love it. My wife, Esperanza, she's a wonderful baker. You'll eat every loaf, every crumb!" And with that he took the bread and put it into the holy ark.

No sooner did he leave than in came the shammes, the synagogue's custodian. "Lord, you know I love to be here in this holy place. That's all I want.

But seven weeks now I've been working and I haven't been paid. I need you to do something -- a miracle! You should make for me a miracle. I believe you're going to. Maybe you've even done it already. Maybe I'll open the holy ark, and there will be a miracle there." The shammes walked to the ark and opened it, and there indeed was his miracle - twelve loaves of bread. Two for the first Sabbath meal, two for the second, two for the third, and one loaf for every day of the week.

The next day, when Jacobi and Esperanza opened the ark and saw that there was no bread there, you should have seen the look of love that passed between them. The next week it was the same, and the week after it was the same. The shammes learned to have faith in God. But if he hung around the synagogue too much or came to work too early, there was no miracle.

This went on for thirty years!

Then one day, Jacobi came to the synagogue with his load of bread. "Senor Dios, I know your bread's been lumpy lately. Esperanza's arthritis. Maybe you could do something? You'd eat better." Jacobi put the bread in the ark, and started to leave, when suddenly the rabbi grabbed him.

"What are you doing?" the rabbi demanded.

"I'm bringing God his bread." Jacobi replied.

"God doesn't eat bread."

"Well, he's been eating Esperanza's bread for 30 years."

The rabbi and Jacobi hid to see if they could figure out what was going on. No sooner did they hide than in came the shammes. He began to mutter, "I hate to bring it up, but you know your bread's been lumpy lately. Maybe you could talk with an angel." And he reached in to grab the bread, when suddenly the rabbi jumped out and grabbed him. The rabbi began to yell at the two men, telling them how sinful they were. He ranted on and on until all three men began to cry. Jacobi began to cry because he only wanted to do good. The rabbi began to cry because all of this had happened as a result of his sermon. The shammes began to cry because suddenly he realized there was going to be no more bread.

Over the sound of their weeping, the three men suddenly heard laughter in the corner. They turned. It was the great prophet Elijah. He was shaking his head and laughing. He said, "Oh rabbi, these men, these men are not sinful. These men are devout. You should know that God has never had more fun than watching what goes on in your synagogue on the Sabbath. He sits with his angels and they laugh. I mean, this man brings the bread and that man takes the bread, and God gets all the credit."

God was entertained this week as well. Early on at General Conference the Kansas Delegation stood up in KU Championship Basketball T Shirts and issued a challenge on behalf of the "Nothing but Nets" campaign to protect

families and children from Malaria through the distribution of treated mosquito nets. They put a basketball up for bidding. Well, every day, there would be a report of how high the bidding was going. They then offered a basketball signed by the bishops to every delegation that had put in a bid and if all the bids are paid up they raised \$312,000 for the Nothing but Nets campaign – at \$10 a net, that's 31,200 families who will be blessed.

The story is told of a second-century angel who was sleeping and hadn't noticed that Jesus had gone down to earth. After his ascension the angel said to Jesus, "Where've you been?" Jesus said, "I've been down on earth."

The angel asked, "How'd it go?"

Jesus said, "They crucified me."

"You must have had a wide influence."

"I had 11 parishioners."

The angel asked, "So your work, it was a failure?"

Jesus said, "I'm not sure. I left it in their hands."

We have been gifted with a challenge. Jesus indeed has left it in our hands to be the church – to be the witness of faith, hope, and love through our presence here. I hope that you will give generously from the depths of your hearts and the heights of your gratitude to sure up this congregation's ability to abundantly be the body of Christ for the world.

Following the conclusion of my thoughts, Jeff Harshmann has some thoughts to share with you this morning.

Dear God: Help us to hear the joy of your laughter this morning as you delight in the ways that we yearn to abundantly share our treasures and our hearts with one another through our commitments of giving. Clear our minds of anxiety and the fears of scarcity and replace those thoughts with the joy of your abundance. Amen.