

*A sermon delivered by the Rev. Laura A. Tisher,
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Church, United Church of Christ, Columbus, Ohio, on Aug. 3,
2008, and dedicated to the glory of God!*

“Just Do It!”

Matthew 14, 13- 21

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Let us pray: May the words of my mouth and the meditations of each one of our hearts be acceptable in your sight, O Lord, our rock and our salvation. Amen.

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“Just Do it!” You all know the Nike logo, I’m sure. Nike is one of the world's leading manufacturers of sports gear. They make equipment for just about any sport you can imagine. Their marketing techniques have been so successful over the years that pretty much everyone in the world recognizes their logo.

Whenever we think of Nike, we also think of this slogan that has been so popular for two decades! Sometimes you’ve got to wonder how marketing teams come up with these logos that catch on so easily and remain popular for so long, yet they seem so simple.

What does “Just Do It!” really mean? Just do what? How? Why? Huh? Since Nike is in the business of making

sports equipment, for them, it means that when it comes to sports, don't talk about it – just do it! Don't just talk about running, go out and run. Don't just talk about baseball, go out and play the game. Don't just talk about swimming, go out and swim that lap!

I can see Jesus saying this exact same thing to the disciples when they were complaining and wondering how they were going to feed the thousands of people that had shown up to see Jesus. Imagine 5,000 or more strangers standing in front of you and demanding to be fed! No wonder the disciples were freaking out!

But Jesus simply says, “Just do it! Give them something to eat.” In the Greek translation, Jesus repeats the word “you” in this phrase, giving it extra emphasis. It’s as if Jesus is saying, “You *yourselves* feed them!” Jesus was tired. He was mourning the death of his friend John the Baptist. But even more, he knew that the disciples were capable of handling this situation – if only they could find the confidence in themselves to “just do it.” Jesus was saying, you have the resources to solve this problem. Take the initiative! Be leaders! Just do it!

I’ve been having a lot of guests at my house lately – mostly friends from out of town who are traveling through Ohio and stopping along their way to say hello. So, you can imagine, I’m sure, that I’ve been spending quite a lot of time recently keeping my house clean and the refrigerator has remained pretty stocked up on a regular basis. It’s been great having so many guests! And it hasn’t been too much work, because I’ve always been able to plan ahead.

But have you ever had an unexpected guest show up at your house, someone who just pops in, without calling ahead? Imagine the situation – it’s a typical day, so the house, most likely, is kind of messy and you haven’t been to the grocery store in quite some time. While you know it is polite to offer this unexpected guest a drink or something to snack on, you have no idea what to give them and really, you just want to shut the door and run away at that point in time. It must have been like this for the disciples too. What were they supposed to do with all of these unexpected guests – thousands and thousands of them?

Jesus says, “Just do it!” In other words, the show is over boys. Now you need to do some work. The disciples had watched Jesus encounter the sick, and they had seen him heal them. They had been with him when he interacted with the uninformed, and they watched Jesus teach them. Jesus’ followers had journeyed with him when he ate with those who had been rejected, and they witnessed him embracing them. They had seen Jesus meet the needy, and observed as he helped them.

Up until this point in time, the disciples had been pretty much sitting on the sidelines watching Jesus do all the work. And now, as Jesus interacts with the disciples, he challenges them to do the work. “You, do something,” he says. More specifically, “Feed the hungry that are right here in front of you.” No longer are Jesus’ followers just the observers. Now, Jesus empowers them to do ministry.

We may never know how all the food appeared in this miraculous story. Commentators continually argue over the many possibilities. There is the literal interpretation: Jesus was God and could therefore create whatever he

desired, out of nothing. Case closed. Another interpretation is that the sustenance that was received must be understood as spiritual nourishment. Not necessarily stomachs, but souls, were filled that day as thousands gathered around Jesus. Or maybe, as Jesus and the disciples offered their modest portions of bread and fish to the crowd, the people were so moved by their generosity that they brought forth their own food that they had stuffed down in their clothing or travel pouches, and by everyone sharing, there was indeed enough for all.

We may never truly know what happened on that day as thousands gathered around Jesus. No matter the *source*, though, we can be certain that the *resources* used to accomplish the task were human driven. No matter where the food came from, without the disciples' physical hands and feet passing out the food, all of those people would have gone hungry that night. This commitment to take *action* was new for Jesus' followers.

Have you ever watched a child – or anyone really – do something for the first time? Sometimes people are very eager to try new things. But other times, babies need a little extra encouragement to take that first step, or a child needs one more nudge to ride that bike for the first time without training wheels. Or they need a little push to go on stage for the first time, to go for that important job interview, or to go back to school after being away for so long. Just do it, Jesus says. You've been sitting around and watching long enough. Now, it's your turn!

The disciples are beginning to learn that being a Christian – a follower of Jesus – is not just about *following*; it's about *doing*. Being a follower of Christ is about more

than just being *learners*; it's about being *workers*. This was a hard lesson that the disciples learned that day when they fed the 5,000. Have you ever thought about how much work it would be to distribute food to 5,000 men, and even more women and children, and then to clean up that mess?! What's the biggest dinner party you've had at your house? A few dozen maybe? But 5,000 or more. It seems like it would take so much planning ahead of time and coordination to make sure the meal was done in a timely and orderly fashion. But there was no time for any of that. Jesus simply says, "Just do it!" And the disciples did. It happened, even though Jesus' followers had so many doubts at first.

It is the same for us today. When we have big decisions in our lives, it is so easy to sit around and talk about it; think about; complain about it. Instead, we have to "just *do it*"!

This is not a foreign concept for this congregation. We have a history of stepping out boldly in faith and just doing it! Whether it's been a justice issue – like becoming Open and Affirming; or whether its been changes and additions to the building, like moving here in 1931 or adding the education wing in the 1960s and now considering the 414 E. Broad St. property; or whether it's creating new staff positions to meet growing needs, like the position of the youth and young adult minister. Here at First Church, we do talk and plan and discuss and even pray, but then we also "just do it," because we know that God is calling us to be a prophetic witness in this time and in this place.

In this biblical story, Jesus was telling his disciples that it was time for them to move from being passive

listeners of the word and to become active doers. Which one are you . . . a passive listener or an active doer? It may seem easy and manageable for some of us to come and sit in these pews each week. And we definitely need this time together to learn, to be fed and to grow spiritually. But there also comes a time when we must then move from being such passive listeners of the word and become active doers of the faith.

God continuously calls us today to actively live out our faith – to share what we believe with our friends, family and co-workers; to reach out to those in need; and to change the world around us by bringing about justice, where there is now too much injustice. Remember, the simple phrase made famous by Nike is “just do it!” . . . not “just *be* it” . . . not “just *talk* it” . . . or even “just *walk* it.” It is “just *do* it!”

This story of feeding the 5,000 is one of the many miracle stories in the Bible. The obvious miracle on the surface may be the multiplication of the loaves and fishes. But there is also another miracle happening here as well. It's the transformation of the disciples from followers to doers. Theologian Barbara Brown Taylor says in *The Seeds of Heaven* that too often “miracles mesmerize us and then we tend to leave everything up to God. Miracles let us off the hook. They appeal to a part of us that is all too happy to let God do it all.”

The message behind the miracle in this story of the feeding of the 5,000 shows us that God needs our help – our participation – in making miracles happen. We need to stop waiting for food to miraculously fall from the sky and share what we have; stop waiting around for miracles to

happen and participate in one instead; stop talking about it, stop complaining, or even not believing, and “just do it”!

When we take on this attitude and start living it out on a daily basis, we can indeed, with God’s help, bring about change and transformation – miracles – to lives all around us, and a world that needs our help so much!
Amen.

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