

Scripture: John 4:5-42

Title: "A Need Fulfilled"

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Several years ago, I learned about a relatively new ministry that was taking place in Center City, Philadelphia. This ministry is a feeding ministry and a hospitality ministry to the homeless and poorer populations of Philadelphia. Now of course, ministries that feed the poor were not a new idea. Soup kitchens have been around for ages. Food pantries have been doing some powerful and definitely much needed work around trying to end hunger. Churches have been on the forefront of seeking to meet the needs of those who do not have enough to eat.

Even still, this ministry in Philadelphia was different. Yes they were there to meet a physical need – the one of filling bellies that were empty and nourishing bodies that were hungry – but this was not the only need being met in that place?

Broad Street Ministry in Center City, Philadelphia was based in an old church building that for years had be shut and closed down. And as this new ministry formed, opening up this old, worn out building, they were earnestly pursuing and continue to pursue their purpose, which is to worship and pray and explore faith, to extend lavish hospitality to each and all, and to work for a more compassionate and just city and world.

And so, every Sunday at 4pm, the doors open as they meet for worship – a widely diverse congregation in all the beautiful ways that diversity is experienced in our world – gather to worship God. And then, after worship, the doors are closed...that is until the next morning. On Monday and again on Tuesday mornings, the doors are open to serve breakfast to those in need. The doors open once again on Thursday, Friday, and Saturday for lunch, and again on Tuesday and Wednesday for dinner. And people who are homeless or just need help with a few meals a week would come and be fed.

However, these meals were not what you might expect them to be. First of all, there are no lines in which people stand to receive food. A friendly hello greets every guest. And those who come are truly seen as guests coming to share a meal. The guests are seated at round tables – where they get to see other people and be seen by other people. A plate of food is then brought to each guest which is created by a culinary trained chef and is served by a volunteer server and the entire table is served at the same time and they partake together. And in a given week, this ministry serves more than 1300 guests.

But the hospitality does not end there. This ministry also offerings mail services for more than 3000 participants who are homeless and don't have a physical address which makes it hard for many things, including applying for jobs. They offer personal care items. They offer clothing. They offer garment mending. They offer legal services and medical assistance with nurses who are present at a variety of times throughout the week. They offer therapeutic arts- which form a calming and creative atmosphere that provides psychological, emotional, and spiritual benefits to these vulnerable individuals.

Ever since I first heard about this ministry and since the first time that I was able to experience it, I have been blown away by it. Not simply by the numbers of those who are impacted – which are certainly amazing - but by the nature of this ministry.

Everybody who enters their doors is coming for a need to be fulfilled. Whether they are in need of a meal, of a nurse, or of a mended coat, each guest comes with a physical need that they are seeking to have fulfilled. And the ministry at Broad Street seeks to take care of those physical needs. But, they meet far more than simply the physical needs of those who enter their doors, and in doing so, they follow in the footsteps of Jesus.

As we read today in our scripture reading, the Samaritan Woman approached Jacob's well where Jesus was seated, she was coming with a physical need – the need for water. This was her purpose for going there. She simply needed water for the day. But she

then met Jesus. And Jesus spoke to her – “Give me a drink”. And she was astonished that he was speaking to her. After all, Jews and Samaritans were at odds with one another and were taught to not interact. But yet, Jesus was speaking to her. Jesus first fulfilled her need to be simply seen – for her humanity to be acknowledged through the simple act of speaking. And we all have that need don’t we – to be seen; for our existence to be cared about or for it at least to be acknowledged. But Jesus doesn’t stop with simply seeing her but goes on to see her deeply – talking about her past and her present. Acknowledging the stories that lie behind this woman – Jesus again fulfilled her need to be fully seen and when Jesus sees her fully, remains with her. Again, a need that we all have – to not feel hidden but to know that we are fully seen by God and to know that God never walks away from us. And then, with the realization of Jesus as the Messiah and the Savior of the World, Jesus fulfilled her need to be profoundly loved and enveloped with grace that comes from above. Again, a need that we all do share. When she came to the well, she came to meet a physical need but what she received was so much more. Jesus fulfilled her need to be seen, to be seen fully, to be embraced anyway, and to experience the love and grace of God!

When people walk through the doors at Broad Street Ministry, there is a striving to meet these needs as Jesus did as well as the physical. To be greeted with a hello...to be simply seen. To be served a meal that is brought to you...acknowledging the humanity within us all. To be cared for in mind, body, and soul...to be seen fully as a whole person. And, by the love extended through it all, to experience a glimpse of God’s love and grace.

Beloved in Christ, shouldn’t we strive to do the same. Shouldn’t we see the people around us, even the stranger, and acknowledge their presence and humanity with at least a “hello”. Shouldn’t we be willing to listen to the stories, know the stories behind a person, and love them regardless? Shouldn’t we share God’s love and grace in all that we say and all that we do meeting the deep needs that are within us all? This is part of our call our Christ’s disciples.

And finally, shouldn't we welcome the presence of others, the presence of God, and the love of Jesus into our own lives for these needs to be met within us as well? After all, these needs run deep within us all. The need to be simply seen. The need to be fully seen. The need to experience God's love and grace in very real ways. These are within us and within all people. Oh that these needs would be fulfilled within you, within me, and within all of God's people. Amen.