

# “Selected Gospel Sections”

Spring Series 1

Lesson 7

## “Five Thousand are Fed”

Matthew 14:3-21; Mark 6:32-44; Luke 9:10b-17; John 6:1-15.

**Objective:** To understand the message of the Gospel accounts in their context within each work independently and then to compare the accounts to each other to seek understanding of emphasis and focus. The goal is then to apply this message to our time and context in order to understand the message’s call on our lives.

**Materials:** To use the Greek, Syriac, and other ancient translations in order to help us understand the message of these Gospels. We will also examine the writings about these passages in journal articles, commentaries and other sources.

### Procedures

1. To first translate each text from Greek and then compare it to other ancient translations.
2. To identify issues of importance within the texts and to explore possible meanings as they applied to the original audience.
3. To take the meaning for the original audience of the Gospels and to understand it how applies to our modern context and cultural situation.
4. To explore ways that these text call the disciples of Jesus to live their lives as faithful followers.

**Matthew 14:3-21** <sup>3</sup> For Herod seized John, bound [him] and put him in prison because of Herodias, the wife of his brother Philip. <sup>4</sup> For John was saying to him, "It is not right for you to have her." <sup>5</sup> And while wishing to put him to death, he was afraid of the crowd, because they regarded him as a prophet. <sup>6</sup> But after Herod's birthday came the daughter of Herodias danced in the midst of them and she pleased Herod. <sup>7</sup> Therefore, on oath he promised to give her whatever she might ask. <sup>8</sup> And she, persuaded by her mother, said, "Give to me, here, upon a platter the head of John the Immerser." <sup>9</sup> And the king was grieved because of the oaths and the ones eating with him, he commanded it to be

**Mark 6:32-44** <sup>32</sup> And they departed in the boat into the wilderness place by themselves. <sup>33</sup> And many saw them going away and recognized them; and on foot, from all the towns, they hurried together there and arrived before them. <sup>34</sup> And after arriving He saw a great crowd and He had compassion upon them because they were as sheep without a shepherd, and He began to teach them many things. <sup>35</sup> And the hour had already become late, His disciples came to Him saying that, "this is a wilderness place and already the hour is late. <sup>36</sup> Release them, in order to go into the surrounding country and villages and buy themselves something to eat." <sup>37</sup> But He answered and said to them, "You give them something to eat."

**Luke 9:10b-17** <sup>10b</sup> And He took them and He withdrew privately to a town being called Bethsaida. <sup>11</sup> And after the crowds came to know they followed Him and welcoming them He spoke to them concerning the kingdom of God, and He gave treatment to those who needed to be healed. <sup>12</sup> And when the day was almost over the twelve came to Him and said, "Release the crowd, in order that thy may go into the surrounding villages and countryside, to lodge, and to find food, because we are in a wilderness place. <sup>13</sup> But He said to them, "You give them something to eat." But they said, "We have no more than five loaves and two fish, unless going, we buy food for all these people." <sup>14</sup> For there were

**John 6:1-15** <sup>1</sup> After these things, Jesus went to the other side of the Sea of Galilee, or of Tiberius. <sup>2</sup> But a great crowd was following Him, because they were observing the signs which He was doing upon the weak. <sup>3</sup> And Jesus went up the mountain and sat there with His disciples. <sup>4</sup> And the Passover was near, the feast of the Jews. <sup>5</sup> Then Jesus raising up His eyes and seeing the great crowd coming to Him said to Philip, "Where Might we buy bread in order that these people might eat?" <sup>6</sup> He was saying this testing him for He already knew what He was going to do. <sup>7</sup> Philip answered Him, "Two hundred denarii would not buy enough bread for each to receive a little." <sup>8</sup> One of

given. <sup>10</sup> And he sent and had John beheaded in the prison. <sup>11</sup> And his head, upon a platter, was brought and given to the girl, and she brought it to her mother. <sup>12</sup> And His disciples came, took up the body, and buried it and went and told Jesus. <sup>13</sup> Now after Jesus heard (this) He departed from there in a boat into a wilderness place on His own; and the crowds after hearing [this], followed Him on foot from the towns. <sup>14</sup> And after going ashore He saw a great crowd and He had compassion upon them and He healed their sick. <sup>15</sup> But after evening came the disciples came to Him saying, "This is an isolated place and the hour is already passed, release the crowds, in order that they may depart into the villages and buy food for

And they said to Him, "Are we to go and buy two-hundred denarii of bread and give it to them to eat?" <sup>38</sup> And He said to them, "How many loaves do you have? Go away and see." And after finding out they said, "Five, and two fish." <sup>39</sup> And He ordered them all to sit down in groups, of groups upon the green grass. <sup>40</sup> And they sat down in groups of groups of hundreds and of fifties. <sup>41</sup> And taking the five loaves and the two fish, after looking up into the heaven, He blessed and broke the bread and gave it to [His] disciples to set it before them, and the two fish He divided among them all. <sup>42</sup> And all ate and were filled, <sup>43</sup> and they took up twelve baskets full of broken pieces and of the fish. <sup>44</sup> And those eating the

about five thousand men. And He said to His disciples, "Get them to sit down in groups of about fifty each." <sup>15</sup> And they did so and they all were seated. <sup>16</sup> And taking the five loaves of bread and the two fish, He looked up in the heaven and blessed them and broke them and gave them to the disciples to set before the crowd. <sup>17</sup> And they ate and were all filled, and the left over pieces were gathered, twelve baskets of broken pieces.

His disciples said to Him, Andrew the brother of Simon Peter. <sup>9</sup> "There is a boy here who has five barley loaves and two fish; but what are these among so many?" <sup>10</sup> Jesus said, "Make the men sit down." Now there was much grass in the place; therefore the men sat, the number was five thousand. <sup>11</sup> Then Jesus took the loaves and after giving thanks divided them to those who were seated so also the fish, as much as they wanted. <sup>12</sup> And when they were satisfied, He said to His disciples, "Gather the remaining fragments, in order that nothing is lost." <sup>13</sup> Therefore, they gathered and filled twelve baskets of fragments from the five loaves of barley which remained from those who had eaten. <sup>14</sup> When the men saw the sign that was done they were saying that

themselves.” <sup>16</sup> But [Jesus] said to them, “They do not have a need to depart, you give them something to eat.” <sup>17</sup> And they were saying to Him, “We only have here five loaves and two fish.” <sup>18</sup> And He said, “Bring them here to me.” <sup>19</sup> And after commanding the crowds to sit down upon the grass, taking the five loaves and the two fish, He looked into the heaven, He blessed them and after breaking them, He gave the loaves to the disciples and the disciples gave them to the crowds. <sup>20</sup> And everyone ate and they were filled, and they took up what was left over of the broken pieces, twelve baskets full. <sup>21</sup> And those eating

bread were five thousand men.

this one truly is the prophet, the one coming into the world. <sup>15</sup> Therefore Jesus recognized that they were about to come and take Him by force and make Him King, He withdrew again into the mountain alone.

**were about five-thousand  
men, besides women and  
children.**

The account of the feeding of the five thousand men by Jesus is a story that is known by most and yet perhaps truly not fully understood by many. It is a story that is found in all four Gospel accounts. Some would see the miracle as one of multiplying miraculously five loaves and two fish in order to feed a vast multitude. Others have seen the miracle of Jesus as somehow having persuaded this vast crowd to share food that they had carried with them on their journey to hear Jesus speak. Certainly this would be a great miracle, and in his sermon of October 2007 Samuel Kobia (the first African to be elected General Secretary - 2004-2009 - of the World Council of Churches<sup>1</sup>) advocates this sharing and selflessness as a miracle that the church is called upon to replicate as the disciples of Jesus.<sup>2</sup> Certainly this would be in alignment with what we find after the Day of Pentecost when the early believers "...united and shared everything."<sup>3</sup> Though, as you might expect, not everyone agrees with this interpretation of the "sign" of Jesus as recorded in the

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<sup>1</sup> This is a group that is a worldwide fellowship of 340 global, regional and local churches representing a Christian population of over 590 million people. In 2010 Dr. Samuel Kobia was appointed Ecumenical Special Envoy to Sudan by the All Africa Conference of Churches. He is Kenyan, born in 1947, and serves as a minister in the Methodist church.

<sup>2</sup> Samuel Kobia, "What's in a miracle? Feeding the Five Thousand," *The Ecumenical Review*, 59:4 (2007), PP. 533-536.

<sup>3</sup> Acts 2:43-47 - <sup>43</sup> **A sense of awe came over everyone. God performed many wonders and signs through the apostles.** <sup>44</sup> **All the believers were united and shared everything.** <sup>45</sup> **They would sell pieces of property and possessions and distribute the proceeds to everyone who needed them.** <sup>46</sup> **Every day, they met together in the temple and ate in their homes. They shared food with gladness and simplicity.** <sup>47</sup> **They praised God and demonstrated God's goodness to everyone. The Lord added daily to the community those who were being saved.** CEB.

Gospels. One that does not agree is the Apostle John who clearly says that the twelve baskets were filled with fragments of the five loaves.<sup>4</sup> Mark also indicates that the baskets were filled with broken pieces of the loaves and two fish that Jesus had broken.<sup>5</sup>

This is in fact the only miracle of the ministry of Jesus that actually is recorded in all four Gospels. This perhaps should not be seen as surprising as this is the only chapter in John's Gospel that deals with the Galilean phase of Jesus' ministry, while the Galilean ministry of Jesus is a great concern for the Synoptists.<sup>6</sup> In this section of John, there are two signs recorded, the Feeding of the Five Thousand (6:1-15), and the Walking on the Water (6:16-21).<sup>7</sup> One of the questions to ask regarding this story is why is it, of all the miracles of Jesus, the one that is recorded in all four Gospels? What is so important about this story that it should be included so widely? A part of the answer may be found in the fact that this passage has strong eschatological implications. Just as it was the case that God had fed Israel in the wilderness, so Jesus now fed

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<sup>4</sup> John 6:13 **Therefore, they gathered and filled twelve baskets of fragments from the five loaves of barley which remained from those who had eaten.**

<sup>5</sup> Mark 6:42-43 **And all ate and were filled, <sup>43</sup> and they took up twelve baskets full of broken pieces and of the fish.**

<sup>6</sup> D. A. Carson, *The Gospel According to John* (Grand Rapids MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1991), p. 267.

<sup>7</sup> George R. Beasley-Murray, *John*, Word Biblical Commentary series, Vol. 36 (Waco TX: Word Books, Publisher, 1987), p. 85.

the multitude in the wilderness.<sup>8</sup> God had fed Israel in the wilderness with manna, through Moses, so now Jesus feeds the people in a “wilderness” (ἐρήμος - *eremos* - desolate, lonely, solitary) place.<sup>9</sup>

This miracle, and I think the miracle is more than getting the people to share their food, was the multiplying of a small amount of food to feed vast numbers. It seems highly improbable that people living during this time would have been carrying the vast amounts of bread and fish that would have been necessary to feed so abundantly such a large crowd by sharing what they were carrying with them. Sharing of food also does not explain the picking up of the twelve basketfuls after everyone had eaten their fill. If the food belonged to the people surely Jesus would not have collected it in the baskets. The people of this time and region largely lived on a subsistence level. They were not middle class, as the middle class during this era was almost non-existent, it was very small, and by and large, the major proportion of the people were lived at a subsistence level and would not have had the resources to carry around with them the provisions for a feast that would have allowed so large a group to be filled.<sup>10</sup> A part of the reason that all four Gospels

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<sup>8</sup> Exodus 16:4 - **Then the LORD said to Moses, “I’m going to make bread rain down from the sky for you. The people will go out each day and gather just enough for that day. In this way, I’ll test them to see whether or not they follow my Instruction.** CEB.

<sup>9</sup> Mark L. Strauss, *Mark*, in the Zondervan Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids MI: Zondervan, 2014), p. 279.

<sup>10</sup> Bruce W. Longenecker, *Remember the Poor: Paul, Poverty, and the Greco-Roman World* (Grand Rapids MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2010).

record this account is that they understood the significance of this event in indicating not only the identity, but also the power of Jesus. This miracle points forward to God's future eschatological banquet and acts as a preview that is reenacted each time the Lord's Supper is celebrated. For people living at this subsistence level the anticipation of such a great feast was a powerful symbol of hope. The metaphor of this banquet also points forward to the restoration of all creation and to "eternal fellowship" with the Creator God.<sup>11</sup>

In the words of the prophet Isaiah we find these words: **7 He will swallow up on this mountain the veil that is veiling all peoples, the shroud enshrouding all nations. 8 He will swallow up death forever. The LORD God will wipe tears from every face; he will remove his people's disgrace from off the whole earth, for the LORD has spoken.**<sup>12</sup> This same theme is found in John 6:51 in the discourse following the miracle of the "Feeding of the Five Thousand:"<sup>13</sup> when Jesus indicates that the one eating the bread coming down from heaven will live forever He links the miracle of the feeding of the five thousand with the

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<sup>11</sup> Mark L. Strauss, *Mark*, p. 279.

<sup>12</sup> Isaiah 25:7-8 - CEB.

<sup>13</sup> Mark L. Strauss, *Mark*, p. 279.

eschatological hope that is to come.<sup>14</sup> There are powerful images contained in this miracle that will have called the people to understand the coming of Jesus at a totally new level. He seeks to rip away their veil of misunderstanding and to open their minds and hearts to new vistas of understanding. Often it is the case that getting someone to change their preconceived notions is an extremely difficult proposition. Using this powerful imagery from the time of Moses would have immediately brought the story of Moses in the wilderness to the minds of the people. Moses promised that one day a prophet like him would be raised up in the midst of their community.<sup>15</sup> The feeding of such a large number of people in the wilderness will have surely brought questions to their minds as to whether Jesus was indeed the one who was prophesied by Moses. This will have been why they sought to make Him king (cf. John 6:15). They understood that the sign that He had just performed was an indication that He was indeed that prophet. For those who were very attentive, or perhaps after the resurrection this would be a sign of Jesus as the Son of God and the initiator of the restoration of the New Heavens and the New Earth.

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<sup>14</sup> **I am the living bread that came down from heaven. Whoever eats this bread will live forever, and the bread that I will give for the life of the world is my flesh.** CEB .

<sup>15</sup> Deuteronomy 18:15-16 **The LORD your God will raise up a prophet like me from your community, from your fellow Israelites. He's the one you must listen to.** <sup>16</sup> **That's exactly what you requested from the LORD your God at Horeb, on the day of the assembly, when you said, "I can't listen to the LORD my God's voice anymore or look at this great fire any longer. I don't want to die!"** CEB.

In the three Synoptic Gospels there is also a more foreboding side to this narrative. In the “Feeding of the Five Thousand” miracle the failure of the disciples appears somewhat muted when they seem to fail to understand the power of Jesus. This failure is seen in the fact that, at first, the disciples encourage Jesus to send the crowd away to find food (Matthew 14:15; Mark 6:35; and Luke 9:12), what appears to be a very legitimate, reasonable and compassionate request — and then they express dismay at Jesus’ suggestion that *they* feed the people (Matthew 14:16; Mark 6:37; and Luke 9:13). “For those with eyes of faith, these are failures, but any pragmatist would forgive the disciples for failing to anticipate such a miracle.”<sup>16</sup> It makes me wonder how many things we fail to understand as possibilities for God to do great things in the midst of our own lives. It is often easy for us to see the failures in others without realizing that the tests of faith that they face also come to us. In those moments there are unique opportunities for the power of God to be displayed and for our trust to be demonstrated. It is in the moments when uncertainty and pragmatism seem the order of the day that faith and imagination are called for all the more.

It is perhaps in such moments when we do not even realize that our faith is being tested that it is most important to act in faith. In those moments, to see and to trust the hand of God is most crucial. These are the

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<sup>16</sup> Mark L. Strauss, *Mark*, p. 279.



moments that the ancient heroes of the faith were commended for by God.<sup>17</sup> So often as I have sat in meetings with brothers and sisters in Christ when discussions are taking place about doing something that they feel God is calling them to do, there will be more of a focus on what is practical and possible, taking into consideration our own strength and our own resources than focus on the calling of God to do this task. Seldom do I see it to be the case that there is the challenge issued to step out in faith. At times, I have heard people say we should put off making a decision in order to pray more. This can be a great thing to do, but I have found that it often becomes an excuse for not stepping out in faith and postponing or even vetoing the decision politely. We seem so afraid to step out into danger, danger of failing, danger of God not showing up to display His power that we can often fail to act. It is important to know that the direction that we are headed is the direction that God is calling us to go. Prayer and listening are a critical part of ascertaining that this is the case. We need to be a people of prayer and people that listen to the voice of God, but we must never let prayer become an excuse or a crutch that prevents us from acting in faith.

Once we hear the calling of God clearly, it is time for action, not hesitancy, not for the counting of resources to see if we will do this or not, though perhaps to understand that the only way that this will work

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<sup>17</sup> Hebrew 11:1-40.



is if God shows up we count our resources. It is perhaps in the midst of comprehending our own inadequacy and shortcomings that we can truly come to understand the working of God in our lives and in our world. Surely the church should be a place where such thinking, such daring, such faith, are the norm rather than the exception. The world in which we live is indeed fragmented and fractured; so severely and so completely that there is absolutely no way that we as human beings can hope to put it back together again. “Not all the kings horses nor all the kings men can put Humpty Dumpty back together again.” Indeed we should expect this. The account of the Tower of Babel<sup>18</sup> is an indication that so often it is the case that we as human beings seem to be able to unite for things that are not good and are not what God would have us to do. He broke human unity at that point by confusing their language. Unity is hard, for many reasons, but it is also a hope and a prayer of Jesus,<sup>19</sup> as well as a calling to unity with God.

This set of passages from the Gospels recounting the feeding of the five thousand calls us to recognize that things that we see as impossible are indeed possible with God. So often we know that this is the right answer to the question that we face, but we fail to make it a reality in the way that we live. The coming of

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<sup>18</sup> Genesis 11:5-9.

<sup>19</sup> John 17:21 **I pray they will be one, Father, just as you are in me and I am in you. I pray that they also will be in us, so that the world will believe that you sent me.** CEB.

Jesus to this earth is something that is meant to inspire us to be more than the sum of our parts, more than just one more generation of human beings living on a spinning mass hurling through space. We are more than just an infestation of life forms living out a limited existence in the vastness of space all alone except for those that happen to be occupying space near us for a season. If that is all we are then we are truly pitiful and life is largely pointless, but there is so much more. I recently read a book that basically trashed the literal belief in the story of the creation of mankind by God, the story of Adam and Eve. I struggled with many things in this book that was in fact incredibly well researched and written by a gifted writer. Finally at the conclusion of the book he speaks about the sense of loss and even “nausea” that was experienced by Darwin as he came to a belief that led him to reject the creation account as literal in Genesis. Those things that had so shaped his vivid imagination, *Paradise Lost* by John Milton and *Henry IV* by William Shakespeare lost all appeal for him along with his appreciation of paintings and music that he had once loved now caused him to be nauseas. ‘Darwin was not proud of this nausea and did not commend it to his children. “The loss of these tastes,” he told them, “is a loss of happiness, and may possibly be injurious to the intellect, and more probably to the moral character.”’<sup>20</sup> Though I disagree with most of the conclusions of Darwin, I can agree

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<sup>20</sup> Stephen Greenblatt, *The Rise and Fall of Adam and Eve* (London: The Bodley Head, 2017), p. 283.



with at least this statement. Though I think there is far more than this to be gained from belief in not only these things but also in the God who created all things.

Stephen Greenblatt, who wrote this book, is a professor of humanities at Harvard University, a Pulitzer Prize winning author, of Ashkenazi Jewish descent, and he indicates that he has no solution to what baffled Darwin himself, but he indicates that the story of Adam and Eve is important, even though he does not believe it is literal. He says, “They are unforgettable embodiments at once of human responsibility and of human vulnerability. They convey with exceptional vividness the possibility of deliberately choosing in the pursuit of knowledge to disobey the highest authority or, alternatively, the possibility of being seduced into making a foolish choice whose catastrophic consequences will be felt for all time.”<sup>21</sup> I believe that the Gospel writers will have understood that the “Feeding of the Five Thousand” event was a watershed moment in the discipling of the Twelve Apostles, challenging them to see the world through new eyes, through eyes of faith and trust in a God that are not bound by our limitations; God is limitless. I believe that a part of the implication of humans being made in the image of God is that we can imagine far beyond the capabilities of

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<sup>21</sup> Stephen Greenblatt, *The Rise and Fall of Adam and Eve*, p. 284.



our own resources, we can imagine things that are greater, more beautiful, more majestic, more moral, more loving, and more selfless than what we have experienced, exactly because we are made in God's image.

It is perhaps in this aspect, our imagination, that we have the greatest access to God in our world. God touches our imaginations with the stories that we can read of His interactions with others who were people of great imagination, people such as Abraham who imagined being the father of a great multitude of people in a land far from the familiarity of his father's house: Moses who could imagine leading a people from slavery into freedom and a land that had been promised to his forefather Abraham: To prophets that hoped and imagined that a nation destitute, and destroyed could be restored and could prosper once more. To kings such as Hezekiah that when confronted with overwhelming forces, that sought to destroy his nation and his people imagined that there might still be hope and that there might still be something better to come. With the coming of Jesus our imaginations and our hearts should be fueled with an even greater expectation that should fuel us to great things.

When the angel came to Mary and told her that she would bear a son that would be called "God's Son," she asked how this would be possible since she had not had sexual relations with a man? The angel

indicated that God is greater than we can even imagine stating that, “Nothing will be impossible with God.”<sup>22</sup>

There is a small word in this sentence that is sometimes translated in other ways, but is literally “with” (παρὰ), in this context. This word means that the great imagination that He has given to His image-bearers can now “with” *God* have unlimited potential. In the training of His disciples Jesus sought to instill this understanding in them. Today, He still seeks to instill it in His disciples. We are not bound by the universe of limited resources, we have a God of limitless potential that is “with” us. This is the promise of “God with us” (Emmanuel). For those that walk “with” God nothing is impossible. Even more than we imagine is possible. Not one ever imagined that God could, or would, come to earth in human form, live, die, and rise again. God seeks to expand our vision, our imaginations, so that we can fulfill our destiny as image-bearers to the whole universe. Our imaginations can be great tools to proclaim to the world the power, the beauty, and the majesty of our great God.

When you face the impossible it is perhaps best to ask are you “with” God? If you are, this is an opportunity for God to demonstrate His power and presence. Whether it is church budget meeting, a missions meeting, a children’s education meeting, a benevolence meeting, a PTA meeting at your local school,

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<sup>22</sup> Luke 1:37.



or a choice about your own personal career or finances I pray that you and I will not forget that “with” God nothing is impossible. We can even feed five thousand people with five loaves and two fishes “with” God. To be fair this reliance upon God is not to be used as an excuse for poor planning and preparation, but sometimes even with the best planning and preparation, when we know that this is what God wants us to do we should not shrink back, but step out in faith. and move forward, imagining what God can do.

# Synopsis

The account of the feeding of the five thousand is the only miracle story of Jesus that is found in all four Gospels. Despite it being found so widely in the Gospels there is still some debate as to exactly what the nature of the miracle actually is. Some see it as uniting the people to share their provisions with one another so that everyone eats their fill. Truly uniting people is in fact a great miracle, but this is not the miracle that is recounted by the Gospel writers. Mark and John both indicate quite clearly that the miracle is indeed the multiplication of the five loaves and the two fish that are then gathered into twelve baskets by the disciples.

The reason this miracle is found in all four gospels is likely because it delivers a message of eschatological hope to the people that Jesus is the prophet promised by Moses. There was also hope prophesied in the Prophets, such as Isaiah, regarding the restoration of creation and the abolition of death. This is perhaps only hinted at here, but certainly this would have been apparent to those who believed in Jesus after the resurrection. Even as this account initially unfolded it is surely the case that Jesus sought to generate understanding and to strip away the veil of misunderstanding that was still heavily upon His



disciples. Jesus seeks to challenge them to have faith, to trust in Him. Though there is not a great deal of criticism for their lack of faith in this account there is some; and this criticism will grow over time as Jesus continues to challenge them to have faith. He seeks to teach them to rely on more than the limited resources available to them. He challenges them to imagine something greater, something that only God can do.

This story challenges us to trust God and to hope and imagine what God can accomplish: the challenge is the same as faced by the ancient heroes of faith who met the challenge to trust in God; people like Abraham, Moses and Hezekiah. We are challenged today to believe in a limitless God who seeks fellowship with His image-bearers and seeks to dwell in their presence as their God. In our lives we face challenges each day that call upon us to follow God and to trust Him to supply what is needed to answer His calling and to fulfill His will.

# Questions

1. Do you think that God wants us to use our imaginations in service of Him and His kingdom? Why, or why not?
2. When you are confronted with something unexpected what is your default method of coping?
3. If you had been with Jesus when He was teaching the people would you have acted differently than they did? Why, or why not?
4. Why do you think this story is so important so that it is the only miracle of Jesus included by all four Gospel writers?
5. How do you think this story has applications for how you live your life each day?
6. What are some ways that you can find yourself failing to recognize that God is present when you make important decisions in your daily life?
7. What are some ways that you can seek to be a person of Godly imagination more fully as you live your life?
8. What are some ways that you believe the people of God are called to be people of imagination and faith in our world today?
9. Why do you think it is the tendency of people to try and to be practical and to count the cost when they are doing something that God has called them to do?

10. What are some ways that you have seen God calling you to trust Him as you live out your life as a disciple of Jesus Christ?
11. What are some ways that we can encourage one another to live more fully as people of great faith today?
12. As Matthew gives His account of the feeding of the five thousand it comes right after he writes about the beheading of John the Immerser. What impact do you think reminding people of the feeding of the five thousand was meant to have on people who had heard of John's beheading?
13. What are some ways that you personally step out in faith as you follow God?
14. How important do you think community is in building, and in sustaining, your faith in God?
15. In what ways are "faith" and "imagination" different; and in what ways are they related to one another?

# To Take Home

## **What is Important to know?**

It is important to know that when we are “with” God nothing is impossible. In the account of the Feeding of the Five Thousand, Jesus challenges His disciples to have faith and to believe. Often, when we are challenged to follow God into the unknown, or into uncertainty we can be afraid of failure. It is in times like this that we must imagine more than is possible with our own resources and perhaps even what seems rational from a worldly perspective. What are some things, or circumstances that you find particularly challenging to your faith?

## **Where is God in these words?**

God is in these words calling the disciples into deeper faith and understanding. Each day we are confronted with things that challenge our faith just as the first disciples of Jesus were challenged. These are moments of testing and growth. The feeding of massive numbers of people with limited resources is only one manifestation of what such tests looked like for the first disciples. Today, we are disciples of Jesus and just as there were tests for the first disciples there are also tests for us. What are some ways that you seek to rise to the challenges of your tests of faith in Jesus?

## **What does any of this mean for how I live my life?**

Recognizing that life is filled with things that challenge our faith in Jesus is important for our growth. We will all face challenges, and tests; this is certain, how we respond is of critical importance. Learning to follow Jesus stands at the core of what it means to be a Christian, a disciple. We are called to be learners all the days of your lives, to be disciples. We are not called to do this alone, but in community with God, and with other disciples. What are some ways that you seek to be in community with God and His people?

## **What is the word of God calling us to do?**

The word of God is calling us to be people of faith, that trust in Him to guide our path and to give us strength beyond the resources that we can perceive with our senses. Faith calls for us to imagine possibilities that are greater than the world sees as possible and to trust God in the midst of all the challenges we face as we walk with Him. What provides you with the strength that you need to overcome your struggles as a faithful disciple of Jesus Christ?