

Semicontinuous  
**Gen. 32:22–31**  
**Ps. 17:1–7, 15**

Complementary  
**Isa. 55:1–5**  
**Ps. 145:8–9, 14–21**

**Rom. 9:1–5**  
**Matt. 14:13–21**

# You Give Them Something to Eat

## Goal for the Session

*In the feeding of the five thousand, adults will celebrate that everything comes from God and plan ways to be faithful disciples.*

## ■ PREPARING FOR THE SESSION

### Focus on Matthew 14:13–21

#### WHAT is important to know?

—From “Exegetical Perspective” by Jae Won Lee

The feeding of the five thousand also has theological meaning. In this context, Jesus proclaims the arrival of God’s ruling activity by performing acts that manifest God’s ruling activity (see 12:28). When Jesus looks up to heaven and blesses the five loaves and two fish, he is serving the weak on the basis of compassion and this manifests God’s ruling activity; his feeding of the hungry on the basis of need without hope of reciprocity manifests God’s ruling activity.

#### WHERE is God in these words?

—From “Theological Perspective” by Iwan Russell-Jones

*Jesus blesses the loaves* (v. 19). This is not some kind of magic ritual in which Jesus imparts to the bread a quality it did not previously have. The blessing of the loaves is an expression of praise and thanksgiving to God, the ruler of the universe, who “bring[s] forth food from the earth” (Ps. 104:14). It is not so much the bread that is being blessed here, as God, the giver of bread. Jesus is acknowledging that God is the one who provides all that is necessary for human life. His blessing is an expression of trust in God. He has already taught his disciples to pray, “Give us this day our daily bread” (Matt. 6:11), and now he is offering that prayer on behalf of five thousand hungry people.

#### SO WHAT does this mean for our lives?

—From “Pastoral Perspective” by Clifton Kirkpatrick

The story of the feeding of the five thousand is very familiar to most Christians, but its message is always new: (1) that God loves and cares for every person on earth and that the promise of “life in fullness” extends to every creature and to the creation itself; (2) that God calls us to be disciples—to be the means through which God’s work is done in our world today; (3) that God promises us in the Holy Spirit that the power of the love of God can break through even in the most unlikely places when we join together as faithful disciples seeking God’s good intentions for our world.

#### NOW WHAT is God’s word calling us to do?

—From “Homiletical Perspective” by Dock Hollingsworth

For disciples who think they have “nothing,” the possibilities are necessarily small. What might have happened if one of the disciples had “looked up to heaven, and blessed and broke the loaves”? Of course we will not know. The more daunting question is, how many times have we heard our Lord say, “Give them something to eat,” and because of our sense of powerlessness turned away? If we think our baskets contain “nothing,” when in fact we have a few loaves and fish, then Jesus has “nothing” with which to feed the hungry.

**FOCUS SCRIPTURE**

**Matthew 14:13–21**

**YOU WILL NEED**

- newsprint or board
- marker
- index cards
- box or basket
- copies of Resource Sheets 1, 2
- Bibles
- copies of Resource Sheet 1 for August 9, 2020

**For Responding**

- option 1: song lyrics, copies of hymnals or songbooks, optional: video-viewing equipment
- option 2: pens, paper, newsprint or board, marker
- option 3: smartphones or Internet-connected devices

## Focus on Your Teaching

Many adults who call themselves disciples are appalled at the bottomless need of millions, but they feel powerless in the face of its enormity. How can one person make a dent in the well-entrenched inequalities that perpetuate hunger? It is tempting to make one gesture, such as contributing to a food bank, and let it go at that. Others may be troubled because they themselves have an abundance of food. Acknowledging that abundance comes not as a result of our own merit, but because of God's good gifts, can help adults respond faithfully to a world of need.

*God of compassion, make me sensitive to the emotions and needs of those I teach. Amen.*

## LEADING THE SESSION

### GATHERING

*Before the session*, print statistics or facts about hunger on index cards, one fact per card. Make one card per participant. Some Web sites that include hunger statistics: [www.cwsglobal.org](http://www.cwsglobal.org); [www1.wfp.org](http://www1.wfp.org); [www.bread.org](http://www.bread.org); and your denomination's hunger program Web site. Place the cards in a box or basket and set it on a table. Print the following on newsprint or a board:

- ✠ What is Jesus revealing about God in his actions?
- ✠ What quality is Jesus demonstrating himself?

For option 3 in Responding, familiarize yourself with the "Hungry Decisions" simulation at <https://fhadvocates.wordpress.com/resources/hungrydecisions/>.

Welcome participants and those who are new to the group. Ask people to take an index card from the basket and silently read the fact or statistic. When all have arrived, ask each person in turn to read aloud the statistic on his or her card. Ask them to complete this statement:

✠ When I hear these facts about the unmet needs of the world, I want to . . .

Acknowledge their feelings when a problem seems overwhelming. Say that in today's Scripture, Jesus' disciples encounter just such a problem.

Pray the following or a prayer of your choosing:

*God of abundance, be with us as we encounter you in your Word today, not just with our ears, but with our hearts, our souls, and our whole beings. In the name of Jesus Christ. Amen.*



# FEASTING on the WORD

## CURRICULUM

**You Give Them  
Something to Eat**

Matthew 15:32–39 and Mark 8:1–10 include a feeding story that is similar to this text: the feeding of the four thousand. Though the numbers have a different significance, these two accounts also convey Jesus' compassion for the physical needs of the crowd.

### EXPLORING

Tell participants that the feeding of the five thousand is the only miracle story found in all four Gospels, indicating its importance. Invite the group to find a comfortable position for sitting and close their eyes, imagining themselves to be one of the disciples as you read the guided meditation from Resource Sheet 2 (Give Them Something to Eat). Ask:

- ✪ How did you react to the news that John the Baptist had been beheaded?
- ✪ What were you feeling when the crowds followed Jesus, despite the fact that Jesus clearly needed to get away by himself?
- ✪ What did you think when Jesus told you to give the people something to eat?

Discuss any other questions that participants may have or any observations they made while imagining themselves to be a part of the narrative.

Ask a volunteer to read the focus scripture, Matthew 14:13–21, aloud. Distribute copies of Resource Sheet 1 (Focus on Matthew 14:13–21) and form pairs. Have one person in each pair read the “What?” excerpt and the other read the “Where?” excerpt. Ask them to discuss together the questions you wrote on newsprint or the board.

Read aloud verse 19. Ask participants:

- ✪ What does this action of Jesus call to mind?

*Eucharist*: from the Greek noun εὐχαριστία (*eucharistia*), meaning “thanksgiving.”

Note that one name we use for the sacrament is the eucharist, meaning “thanksgiving.”

Ask the group to respond to this quote from Dietrich Bonhoeffer and the following question:

- ✪ “While bread is a fruit of the earth, bread really comes down from above as a gift of God alone.”<sup>1</sup> If food is God’s gift and not the result of any particular merit we have, what are the implications for those of us who have an abundance of bread?

Ask the group to read the “So What?” and “Now What?” excerpts silently. Note that Jesus himself did not feed the crowd; rather, he told his disciples to give them something to eat. Invite the group to reflect on times when we have heard our Lord say, “Give them something to eat,” but, because of our sense of powerlessness, have turned away. Discuss the following:

- ✪ What if a disciple had responded to Jesus by doing what Jesus eventually did?
- ✪ How is it a mistaken notion that our baskets are empty, with nothing to offer?

As a transition to Responding, invite the group to ponder what they consider the most unlikely places and situations where the most critical unmet needs are found. Ask:

- ✪ Where are the crowds waiting to be fed today and how is the church responding?

### RESPONDING

Choose one or more of these activities depending on the length of your session:

1. **Hymns of Thanksgiving** Music that communicates thanksgiving for all the earth’s bounty gives voice to the realization that all comes from God. Distribute hymnals and invite adults to locate and read the lyrics for hymns of thanksgiving, such as “Come, Ye

1. Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *The Cost of Discipleship* (New York: Touchstone, 1995), 167.

Option: Search YouTube for “All Good Gifts” and play a clip of your choosing.

**EASY  
PREP**

Thankful People, Come.” Discuss what the lyrics communicate about the source of all that we have, and about what God desires for all humankind. Invite adults to commit to choosing a specific situation to pray for in the coming week—something that is blocking people from the things needed for a full life. Sing together “All Good Gifts” (same lyrics as “We Plow the Fields and Scatter”) or other hymn of thanks.

- 2. From Statistics to Action** In this activity, adults formulate concrete steps to address hunger, responding as faithful disciples. Distribute paper and pens, and ask adults to print the statistic they drew during Gathering at the top of the page and then write some steps they might take to address the problem. Ask them to think about what they might do together, such as becoming involved in a hunger project supported by your congregation, and identify larger steps your church might take, such as participating in a denominational hunger program. List all these ideas on newsprint or a board. Brainstorm ideas for tackling systemic problems, such as lobbying Congress to pass legislation, or writing letters for Bread for the World ([www.bread.org/help/](http://www.bread.org/help/)). Challenge participants to continue to pray and to commit to some small step.
- 3. “Hungry Decisions”** By engaging in a simulation of the choices people living on the margins must make every day, adults can put a human face on world hunger. They can reflect on what they might do together to create more choices and better opportunities for hungry people. Have adults access the “Hungry Decisions” simulation on their smartphones or other Internet-connected device at <https://fhadvocates.wordpress.com/resources/hungrydecisions>. Encourage them to go through the simulation twice, making different choices to see what effects they have on the outcome. After the simulation, discuss:
  - ✪ As posed in the “Now What?” excerpt, in what ways do we act as if there is nothing in our baskets?
  - ✪ What might Jesus do with our loaves and fishes, in order to use it to make possible the abundant life God desires for all?

## CLOSING

Invite the group to close their eyes and imagine Jesus saying, “Give them something to eat.” Then have them imagine the “basket” of the resources they have to offer for feeding hungry people. Invite them to visualize lifting that basket high and blessing it, offering what they have to God and giving thanks to the Creator.

Close with prayer:

*God of abundant life,  
To those who have hunger, give bread.  
To those who have bread, give a hunger for justice. Amen.*

Distribute copies of Resource Sheet 1 for August 9, 2020, or e-mail it to the participants during the week. Encourage participants to read the focus scripture and Resource Sheet 1 before the next session.

August 2, 2020  
You Give Them  
Something to Eat



Adult  
Resource Sheet 1

## Focus on Matthew 14:13–21

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August 2, 2020  
You Give Them  
Something to Eat

Adult  
Resource Sheet 2

## Give Them Something to Eat (A Guided Meditation)

*Imagine you are one of Jesus' disciples.*

It is a difficult time for all you disciples, and very painful for Jesus himself. John the Baptist is dead—killed by Herod in a shockingly brutal way. Jesus has withdrawn, getting into a boat and going off by himself.

You twelve are shocked. Somehow you never expected that John's words and deeds could result in such an appalling act of violence. Jesus is clearly grieving, but you—well, you are just numb.

It's evening now. When Jesus came ashore, he saw that the crowds followed him here on foot. Everywhere you look, there are groups of exhausted people, thousands of them. The urgency of following Jesus blotted out how tired they were, and how very hungry.

One of you says to Jesus, "We're in a deserted place, and the hour is now late; send the crowds away so that they may go into the villages and buy food for themselves." You're hearing these words, but privately you're thinking, how could any nearby village possibly have enough food to sell to so many people, assuming they should have the money to buy it?



Jesus is not looking at you. He is seeing the men, women, and children, dirty and worn out from walking. Some of the children are crying, but still, there's a look of anticipation and hope on many faces. On Jesus' face, you see only deep compassion.

He turns to you and says, "They need not go away; you give them something to eat."

Give them something to eat? He wants you to give them something to eat? In desperation, you scour the crowd, searching for something, anything. "We have nothing here but five loaves and two fish," one of you offers tentatively, apologetically.

Jesus says, "Bring them here to me." Then he directs people to sit down. As far as the eye can see, groups settle on the grass.

Jesus takes the meager offering and looks up to heaven. Breaking the loaves, he begins to hand them to you and the other disciples. You begin distributing the food, sure that at any moment, you'll run out.

All over the hills, groups of people are talking—and eating. Before long, people begin to settle back, sated, gesturing to you to come and collect what is left over. You begin to fill baskets with the broken pieces left over from the meal. Five thousand men, and many more women and children. Full bellies. Twelve baskets of leftovers.

Something to give thanks for, and to ponder.