



Session Six

Jesus pauses his journey and eats with a crowd of 5,000

In this final session, Jesus' pauses his journey, as he sits with a crowd of 5,000 people. When they are together, the disciples face a challenge as to how they can find enough food to feed everyone there. Through this story, we'll explore what it means to be fed until we're full, and how we can be part of Jesus' miraculous transformation.

Opening Prayer

Loving God,

When we are longing for change, you always meet us with your love. When we are hungry, you feed us until we are full. As we explore your word today, help us to listen to our own longing and hunger, and to look for your sustenance in the good news you have to give.

Amen.

Read: Mark 6: 30-44 (NIV)

The apostles gathered around Jesus and reported to him all they had done and taught. Then, because so many people were coming and going that they did not even have a chance to eat, he said to them, "Come with me by yourselves to a quiet place and get some rest." So they went away by themselves in a boat to a solitary place. But many who saw them leaving recognised them and ran on foot from all the towns and got there ahead of them. When Jesus landed and saw a large crowd, he had compassion on them, because they were like sheep without a shepherd. So, he began teaching them many things. By this time, it was late in the day, so his disciples

came to him. "This is a remote place," they said, "and it's already very late. Send the people away so that they can go to the surrounding countryside and villages and buy themselves something to eat." But he answered, "You give them something to eat." They said to him, "That would take more than half a year's wages! Are we to go and spend that much on bread and give it to them to eat?" "How many loaves do you have?" he asked. "Go and see." When they found out, they said, "Five - and two fish." Then Jesus directed them to have all the people sit down in groups on the green grass. So, they sat down in groups of hundreds and fifties. Taking the five loaves and the two fish and looking up to heaven, he gave thanks and broke the loaves. Then he gave them to his disciples to distribute to the people. He also divided the two fish among them all. They all ate and were satisfied, and the disciples picked up twelve basketfuls of broken pieces of bread and fish. The number of the men who had eaten was five thousand.

Check in, in pairs:

- Is this story familiar to you, or are you hearing it for the first time?
- This is one of the many stories about Jesus that is centred around food. Why do you think food is such a common theme?

Lost sheep

When we meet Jesus at the start of this story, he's trying to get some space. He has spent time teaching, healing and talking to the crowds. From the passages just before this story, we also know that

his cousin, John the Baptist, has just been killed by the authorities. We might imagine that Jesus was tired, and grieving for the loss of his friend. When the crowd followed him, we might reasonably expect that he was a little annoyed!

However, the story tells us that Jesus' response was different: 'When Jesus landed and saw a large crowd, he had compassion on them, because they were like sheep without a shepherd.'

Toni and Laura reflect:

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Hearing about the people being lost touched me. Because sometimes, I feel like a rabbit in headlights, just getting through the day. But that touched me, the generosity, you know, feeding people.

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Toni

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When he said that they were 'like sheep without a shepherd', I just thought: that's what I felt like before I found Jesus. I was a lost sheep, running around fields on my own, not knowing what I was doing. And the other thing that struck me was that Jesus said, 'let's go to the quiet place, because we've not had time to eat ourselves', and he gets there and it's just as busy. He's so wonderful, he's not even bothered about that. He's like, oh well, we'll just feed them then. It just got me that he was just like: 'let's get this done.'

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Laura

Discuss:

- Have you ever experienced someone's compassion and care when you felt lost? What did this feel like?
- Jesus responds to the crowd by teaching them, and feeding them. Why do you think both of these things were important to him?

Relying on God to provide

When it's getting late, the disciples can see that the people are hungry and need something to eat. We don't find out who is in the crowd, and whether they have the resources to go and buy food, as the disciples suggest. From other stories about Jesus, we know that often some people following him were struggling or needed his help. Perhaps that was the case for some of the people in this crowd. Laura reflects:

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It made me think of when I was using food banks. It relates to this story a little because I had to go to somebody else to provide food for my son. I didn't even have enough to feed myself. It makes me think about the food bank being Jesus in my story, if that makes sense. I had to lean on them to feed me and my child.

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Discuss:

- Have you ever had to rely on someone else for food? How did it feel?
- Why do you think Jesus thought it was important to feed the crowd?

The disciples didn't think they had the resources to feed the crowd. They weren't convinced by Jesus' belief that they would find a way to feed the crowd, and wanted to send people away to find their own food. When they found five loaves and two fishes, they probably didn't believe that this was going to solve the problem.

Discuss:

- Why do you think they struggled to trust that Jesus would provide?

Feeding until you're full

One of the many miraculous things about this story is that by the end, everyone leaves full and the disciples collect up 12 baskets of leftovers. What begins as a challenge to find enough, finishes with abundance and plenty.

Discuss:

- Why do you think the story includes this detail about leftovers?
- If you were struggling with food insecurity, how do you think you would feel hearing this story?