

The feeding of the 5000 is quite well known – it's recorded in all 4 of the Gospels. There are a few minor differences, because that's what happens with eye witnesses (they remember different things), and each of the 4 Gospels have a slightly different focus, but they all agree on the guts of the story. ..

Luke BTW, which we are studying at the moment, is the longest of the Gospels, but when it comes to the feeding of the 5000, it's the shortest of the lot of them. Luke is very matter-of-fact. He doesn't try to interpret it for us, or to tell us a deeper meaning in it – he just recounts what happened.

And for many people, that's the bit they have trouble with – believing that the feeding of the 5000 happened. And so some folk try to explain it away – They say: (*“Some of those people must've had food tucked away in their pockets, and when the Disciples started distributing the tiny little skerrick they had, they were shamed into sharing theirs as well.”*). ...

Why do people try to come up with this stuff? Not one, of any of the Gospels, give any hint of that. Why do folk try to explain this miracle away? It's because it's a Miracle!!!! And that's the whole point: It's a Miracle!!!!... Why do people want to try and explain miracles away? Because they don't want to believe in God. Or, they don't want to believe that God has any kind of Power...

Some people want to boil Jesus down to being “a nice guy” – a nice chap, who taught us to love one another”... But He's much more than that, and that's exactly what these 4 eye-witness testimonies are telling us: Jesus intervened into the natural/physical world, and brought bread and fish into being,

from where it did not exist... I don't have a problem with that, because that's what God does.

And I don't have any trouble with this because we're told in the Scriptures that Jesus was there at creation. Do you know what He was doing? Creating... God said, "Let us make man in our image, after our likeness...."ⁱ .. Who do you think "us" is? Father, Son and Holy Spirit of course...

Colossians 1:16 tells us that by Christ Jesus all things were created, in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible... all things were created through Him and for Him...

Now, if Jesus created the universe, is it any trouble for Jesus to rustle up a bit of extra tucker for the un-invited visitors??? Of course not... And so Luke's account of the feeding of the 5000, is more about the power and the authority of Jesus... And so, it fits right in to this section we've been reading.

- The calming of the storm;
- the driving out of the legion of demons;
- The healing of the woman who touched Jesus' garment;
- Raising Jairus' daughter back to life;
- and now, the multiplication of the bread and the fish...

It's all building up to the bit we get to next week, where Jesus asks His Disciples, "But who do you say that I am?" And Peter answered, "The Christ of God."

It's about the power; and authority; and the divinity (the God-ness) of Jesus...

Righto, so how does it unfold?

The Disciples have just gotten back from their short-term mission trip. When Jesus sent them out, He said, “Don’t take anything with you”:

- No food;
- No money;
- No bag;
- No change of clothes...

You see, Jesus wanted them to experience what it’s like to be completely dependent upon God. **God** would provide their needs...

And when they came back, they told Jesus everything they’d done on their mission trip. And obviously they’d been provided for – they hadn’t starved to death... And as they shared their experiences, I’m pretty sure it would’ve been very exciting for them.

And Jesus took them and withdrew apart to a town called Bethsaida.

Now, Bethsaida was a fishing village on the North shore of Lake Galilee. .. Only they obviously didn’t stay in the town itself, because we’re told they “withdrew” and they were in “a desolate place” – it’s like Jesus wanted to get away from it all, so He took ‘em bush...

But when all the crowds heard where Jesus was, they followed Him there. (it obviously wasn't isolated enough). Maybe if He'd taken them to Walgett they mightn't have followed.

Now, this gets me thinking: What would ministry professionals today think about this???

You see, When I was training for the ministry, we were told, "You've gotta set boundaries – You've gotta have your set day off, and don't let anything get in the way of that..." If the phone rings, don't answer it; If someone knocks on your door, don't let them in...

Seriously... Where does anyone ever get the idea that as a servant of Jesus, I'm a professional, and so I can be unavailable, because I've decided to have a day off???

Yes, Jesus went out into the middle of nowhere, (presumably to have a bit of time out). You know what? Sometimes when I plan to have a day off, God has other ideas. And that's OK, because He's God.

And so, when the crowds arrived, did Jesus say, "Go away! Come back tomorrow – It's my day off today."

Of course not. In fact, we're told he welcomed them and spoke to them of the kingdom of God And those who had medical needs, He cured them...

And He didn't try to hurry them off – the day wore on. It got so late the 12 Apostles were starting to think,

- “Ah, Jesus, You'd better be sending them on their way
- they're going to be hungry – they're going to need a place to stay...”
- There's a lot of them – they're going to have to spread out amongst the villages and the farms...
- there's nothing here...

They were worried that “Someone will have to provide for the mob”... But hang on a minute, aren't these Apostles the ones who had just learned about God's provision.

When Jesus sent His Disciples out on mission, they had an opportunity to experience the provision of God. And that provision came through the generosity of His people... But now Jesus is taking their dependence on God to a whole next level: **“You give them something to eat.”**

“What??? That's crazy-talk... **We have no more than five loaves and two fish** . There's 5000 men here (plus women & children)... But that's all we've got unless you want us to go and buy some more....

Can you imagine the **im**possibility of that?

- Where would they find that much food?
- How much would it cost?
- How would they transport it all out into the middle of nowhere???

But Jesus meant what He said: **"You give them something to eat."**

And this is the amazing thing that God does – He chooses to do His work through His people. Jesus could have turned stones into bread. He could've made manna come down from heaven, or feed the people on Quale like He did for the People of Israel as they journeyed through the desert...

But Jesus involved His Disciples in what He was doing.

Now, for the Disciples, they were going to have to step out in faith. If they held on to what they had, they probably would've had enough tucker to feed themselves for a couple of days. But if they distributed it amongst the crowds, what good would that tiny amount do them? And then **they'd** have nothing to eat...

And sometimes we can be like that can't we...

Sometimes we want to hold on to the little bit we have, when God is saying, "Give it away. Use it for Me." And we might justify it in our own minds: "If I give it away, it's not going to make much of a difference in the scheme of things. But if I hold onto it, it means a lot for me..."

We feel we can't afford to give what we have... *But you know what? Every time I've given generously, I've never gone wanting. Have you???*

And a Godly farmer might say, *“You know, some folk tell me they can't afford to tithe. But God can easily make up for a tithe. An extra 20mm of rain at a critical time, - that's worth way more than a tithe...”*...

God always provides. And that's what the Disciples were going to learn here. But it took faith. Jesus told them what to do, and they had to do it.

Firstly, get everyone to sit down in groups of about 50. Maybe that made it easier to distribute. It certainly made it easier to know how many they were catering for: 100 groups of 50.

Anyway, they broke them up into groups of about 50 and got them to sit down.

And then Jesus said grace. He took the **five loaves and the two fish**, he looked up to heaven and said a blessing over them.

And then He broke the bread up, and gave it to the Disciples to distribute it. Now, are you following the maths on this?

- 5 loaves to be shared amongst 100 groups.
- That means each loaf has to be divided into 20.
- That's the equivalent of about one slice of bread to be shared amongst 50 people...

And the Disciples did that.

Now, nowhere are we told, at which point the food was multiplied. But when the food was distributed, everyone ate until they'd had enough. And then the leftovers were picked up, and there were 12 baskets of broken pieces left over.

What had happened? A miraculous multiplication of food. It had happened before.

ⁱⁱThe Prophet Elijah spoke the word of God, and a drought came upon the land. And he lived by a brook, and the ravens brought him food. But when the brook dried up, God sent him to a widow. And that night, she had just enough flour and just enough oil for her to make a little cake for her and her son to eat. And she was going to share that with her son that night, knowing that the next day they'd have nothing left, and she and her son would starve to death.

And Elijah said to the woman. "Do not fear; Go and do that – make that little cake, and bring it to me. And after that, go and make something for you and your son... Because God's not going to let that flour or oil run out until after it rains.

And that's what she did. And as she kept using the flour, there was always flour left. And as she used the oil, there was always oil left...

Now, the point of this, is the provision of God, but it's a provision that took faith. At the word of God, the widow took the last meal that she and her son had available, and gave it away. And the miracle of God is that He provided for her for many days.

The Disciples, at the Word of Jesus, took what food they had, and gave it away... And 5000 hungry men ate until they were full, and there were leftovers – a basket-full for each disciple...

You see, the provision of God is something that comes with faith... It's not about God miraculously making us super-wealthy – It's about God always providing us with enough (because that's all you need – is enough) – It's about us being generous with what we have, and God will always ensure that we have enough.

Now, for those Disciples: Yeah, they would've had enough if they held onto it. But I bet they're glad they didn't hold onto it... Getting involved in the work of God like they did – that's really something. Jesus did something amazing that day. And He did it through those Disciples.

What amazing thing does God want to do through you???

Yes, if we hold on to what we have, we'll probably have enough. But the greater blessing, is to be involved in the work of God – The greater blessing, is to use what we have (generously) for the work of God. And we'll **still** have enough.

Let's pray:

Heavenly Father,
We thank You that You are the God who provides.
You know what we need,
and we will never go without what we need.

Lord,
how wondrous it is,
that even though You can do whatever You like,
all by Yourself,
More often than not,
You choose to involve Your people.

And what a blessing that is,
as we give away
everything we have,
knowing You will always
provide what we need...

To You be the glory.

It isn't any surprise to us
that the miraculous is achieved
through the Word of Jesus...
Because that's what our God does.

And Lord,

we are very aware that we are Christians
in a very wealthy country.

And we pray for Your people,
in other lands, who hunger this day.
They hunger because of:

- war;
- poverty;
- disaster;
- persecution.

And Lord, we pray that You would provide for their
needs.

Lord, open our hearts.

Give us generous hearts,
to hear Your words,

"You give them something to eat."

As we take from our excess,
and provide for those who have nothing.

Give us hearts of compassion
and love.

in Jesus' Name,
Amen.

ⁱ Genesis 1:26

ⁱⁱ 1 Kings 17