

# 5 Loaves, 2 Fish, 5,000 People and 12 Baskets Mark 6:30-44

This week begins with Jesus and the disciples united again after time apart, when both triumph and tragedy have occurred. The disciples return with stories of how they have healed and driven out demons in his name, while Jesus is coming to terms with the brutal murder of his cousin John the Baptist. It is understandable that Jesus wishes to escape ‘to a quiet place and get some rest’ (Mark 6:31).

Yet there is no escaping the demands of the crowds who recognise and follow Jesus. Mark tells us that he felt compassion on them, ‘because they were like sheep without a shepherd.’ This phrase would have been recognised by Mark’s first readers as a coded way of suggesting that the people of Israel were suffering from a lack of care and leadership. One of the idealised images of the King in Israel was that of a shepherd figure like David (see Psalm 78:70-72). Could it be that Mark is drawing our attention to the corrupt leadership of Herod, who has just executed John the at the end of a debauched party at his palace?

Mark tells us that Jesus ‘began to teach them many things’ but by the end of the disciples draw his attention to a problem, the fact that it’s late and that people need to be sent away so they can get some food. Jesus looks to the disciples to come up with a solution: “You give them something to eat.” While it is hard not to feel some sympathy for the perplexed disciples who point out that the cost of feeding such a large crowd would amount to 200 denarii (more than half a year’s wages), we can also understand the apparent exasperation of Jesus: why are those who have just healed the sick unable to see how he can use them in this new moment of need?

The disciples are then sent off to see what resources they can pull together, a search that famously yields five loaves and two fish. Jesus then organises the crowd into groups of fifty or a hundred, a practice which some scholars see as echoing the organisation of Israel by Moses in the desert (see Exodus 18:21).

The astonishing miracle which follows is seen by many as an act which places Jesus in the same tradition as other great prophetic leaders of Israel. Comparisons have been drawn to Moses, used by God to supervise Israel in the story of manna in the wilderness (see Exodus 16), and the account of 2 Kings 4:42-44, where we read of Elisha feeding a hundred people with only twenty loaves of barley.

The feeding of the 5,000 is an incredible demonstration of Jesus’ power over the natural order, but also a miracle achieved using natural resources and carried out through the disciples. ‘Jesus reminds them that they can meet any emergency which is not of their own making… by the use of what they have, though it is totally inadequate, if only it is first offered in totality to Jesus to be used by Him.’[[1]](#footnote-1)

**For discussion**

1. During Sunday’s sermon, Trevor suggested that one of the lessons of this story is about the attitudes of those with power over others: the compassion of Jesus the shepherd contrasts starkly with the corrupt kingship of Herod and the disciples’ reluctance to feed the crowds. What does this teach us about how God might want us to use what he has put at our disposal?
2. In spite of the powerful ways they had recently been used to drive out demons and heal the sick (Mark 6:12,13; 30), the disciples fail to see how Jesus might give them what is needed when another miracle is required. Has this ever been your experience? Why do you think we sometimes forget what God has done in the past and therefore lose confidence about what he can do in the present?
3. Can you think of an occasion when you have seen God use apparently limited resources to meet a challenging situation?
4. How does this passage deepen your understanding of what it might mean for SBC to be ‘a generous church: seeking opportunities to bless our neighbours in Selsdon and beyond, as we share the good news of God’s love, mercy and healing’?
1. RA Cole, *Tyndale New Testament Commentaries: Mark,* The Tyndale Press, 1966, p176-7 [↑](#footnote-ref-1)