



GROUP GUIDE: WEEK 6

CONVERSATION STARTER

What is the most interesting or surprising meal you've ever partaken in?

JESUS FEEDS THE FIVE THOUSAND

Matthew 14:1-21

In Matthew 14, Jesus faces a crowd of 5,000 hungry people. And all of them are looking to *him* for help. But Jesus doesn't just feed them bread and fish; he teaches all of them, including his disciples, an important lesson about the kind of kingdom he is bringing into the world.

To understand what Jesus is teaching, though, we have to understand the symbolism behind a few key numbers in Jewish literature. For example, 7 is the number of wholeness or completion. 12 is, of course, the number of the tribes of Israel, representing the entire community of God's people. 5 commonly symbolizes the law because of the five books of Moses (or Torah). And 2 symbolizes the two tablets of the Ten Commandments.

Now, go back and read the story of Jesus feeding the 5,000 again. What do you notice?

This particular miracle is taking place on Jewish territory. Jesus is with his people. Later, we'll encounter a second feeding miracle that happens in Gentile territory. Jesus has compassion on the people, and he asks his disciples to help him feed them.

The problem is, they are in the middle of nowhere, there are a lot of people to feed, and they only have 5 loaves of bread and 2 fish. Imagine what you would've said to Jesus if faced with this dilemma. The disciples must be struck dumb. How on earth could that little provisioning help in the face of so many hungry mouths all looking to them?

And yet, Jesus simply tells them to bring it to him.

Five loaves. Two fish. Symbolically, this is the Law of Moses and the Ten Commandments (5+2=7, completeness!).

Jesus doesn't want to feed this crowd with just anything. He wants to give them ultimate truth, a way of living that leads to life. Jesus wants to give them God's good and complete law—the law that teaches God's people how to love and be loved in return. He wants to welcome them into God's kingdom—a kingdom where there is more than enough to go around.

How many baskets do they have left over after everyone has enjoyed their portion? Twelve. Enough for everyone, for the entire community of God's people.

Jesus is making a profound statement about what it's like to be part of God's kingdom. This is a kingdom where all are welcome and where there is enough to go around.

And Jesus also has an important message for his disciples, too. What do you have to offer those in need? It may feel like nothing at all, like what is in your hands couldn't possibly make a difference. But that is the crazy, ridiculous, miraculous part about life with Jesus. In his economy, there is always enough and more than enough if we're just faithful with what we've been given.

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

1. What stuck out to you about the reading from this week? Was there a verse or idea that was particularly meaningful or challenging for you?
2. How has this week's reading added color to what you think about Jesus?
3. Read Matthew 14:1-12 together. What are some of the characteristics you notice about the kind of kingdom Herod rules over? How are these opposed to the way of Jesus we've been witnessing thus far in Matthew's Gospel?
4. How is the church called to be the hands and feet of Jesus in the face of our community's great needs? What are some of the challenges we face toward that end?
5. What unique skills, talents, resources, or gifts have you been given that might make a big impact in this community? How does this story inspire you to take what you have and offer it to Jesus, to see what he might do with it?

WEEKLY PRACTICE

This week, we invite you to consider how you can model Jesus' example of radical hospitality and care. **Ask God to nudge you toward someone who needs an invitation to sit at your table and share a meal.** This could be on your lunch break, a meet-up to grab coffee in the morning, or over dinner with your family. You do not have to host an elaborate feast or throw a

massive party. Actually, the more radically ordinary, the better. Simply focus on being present over a shared meal with another person or persons you feel God calling you toward. Remember, for Jesus, inviting someone to the table was the equivalent of inviting them into the kingdom and helping them to taste and see the goodness of God.