

## Liz: The Gospel according to John Chapter 6 verses 1 to 15.

### Jesus Feeds the Five Thousand

<sup>1</sup>Some time after this, Jesus crossed to the far shore of the Sea of Galilee (that is, the Sea of Tiberias), <sup>2</sup>and a great crowd of people followed him because they saw the miraculous signs he had performed on the sick.

<sup>3</sup>Then Jesus went up on a mountainside and sat down with his disciples. <sup>4</sup>The Jewish Passover Feast was near.

**Kate:** I want you to imagine that you are in 1<sup>st</sup> century Palestine. You are a peasant residing in a village near the Sea of Galilee. You earn your living by either assisting the local village stone mason or by doing seasonal work for the local land owner. You supplement your family income with a goat for dairy produce and vegetables you grow yourself.

There is a local midwife but little is available by way of medical assistance, particularly for you because your family is poor and medical treatments are expensive and often futile and primitive.

You have no electricity, TV or refrigeration. Fish you catch or buy from the fishermen is salted to preserve it. For entertainment and diversion you rely on villagers who tell good stories or sing songs. Local gossip is always good for entertainment. Anything or anyone different emerging in or around your village is worth your effort to go and see with your own eyes.

So when you heard about John the Baptist you went out to the desert to see him for yourself. There is nothing like first hand information about a celebrity. And what a celebrity John was. He even took the Scribes and Pharisees to task. You watched as he and his disciples baptised people. You listened as he ordered you to repent. You considered it seriously, especially when you heard that he had baptised some one who would be an even bigger celebrity than he was. A great prophet promised by God through the ancient prophets rescue his people. The local gossip is that Jesus is the one!

And then...you heard that John was dead: wickedly killed by Herod as the result of a rash drunken promise. So when you heard about Jesus healing folk you had to see him for your self too. You heard from nearby villagers that he was in town and that he had crossed the lake in a boat. The others reckoned that he was going, with his disciples to a remote mountainside. Probably he wanted to discuss the situation about John's death. You heard for others that he seemed very upset about that. After all the rumour was that they were actually cousins.

Your friends said that they were going along the shore to where they were pretty sure Jesus was going to be, and you dropped your garden hoe and went quickly with the crowd. As you went more and more villagers joined the crowd. You are a quick walker and you were among the first to arrive where Jesus was. You saw him seated on the side of the mountain, with his twelve

disciples close to him. Luckily you were able to squeeze yourself into a really good position where you could see and hear everything.

**Liz :** <sup>5</sup>When Jesus looked up and saw a great crowd coming toward him, he said to Philip,

**Bryan:** "Where shall we buy bread for these people to eat?"

**Liz :** <sup>6</sup>He asked this only to test him, for he already had in mind what he was going to do.

**Liz :** <sup>7</sup>Philip answered him,

**Allan:** "Eight months' wages<sup>[a]</sup> would not buy enough bread for each one to have a bite!"

**Kate:** Poor Philip you think? Fancy asking him about buying food for a crowd this size! There is no market stall in the villages around here that would even have that much food even if you had the cash to spend. And you think, they say that Philip there when Jesus turned the water into wine at that wedding in Cana? Why didn't he just ask Jesus to provide the food the way Mary, Jesus' mother had asked him to at the wedding when they ran out of wine?

**Liz :** <sup>8</sup>Another of his disciples, Andrew, Simon Peter's brother, spoke up,

**Paul:** <sup>9</sup>"Here is a boy with five small barley loaves and two small fish, but how far will they go among so many?"

**Liz :** <sup>10</sup>Jesus said,

**Bryan:** "Have the people sit down."

**Liz :** There was plenty of grass in that place, and the men sat down, about five thousand of them. <sup>11</sup>Jesus then took the loaves, gave thanks, and distributed to those who were seated as much as they wanted. He did the same with the fish. <sup>12</sup>When they had all had enough to eat, he said to his disciples,

**Bryan:** "Gather the pieces that are left over. Let nothing be wasted."

**Liz :** <sup>13</sup>So they gathered them and filled twelve baskets with the pieces of the five barley loaves left over by those who had eaten. <sup>14</sup>After the people saw the miraculous sign that Jesus did, they began to say,

**All:** "Surely this is the Prophet who is to come into the world."

**Liz :** <sup>15</sup>Jesus, knowing that they intended to come and make him king by force, withdrew again to a mountain by himself.

**Kate:** You see Jesus leave.

You are puzzled.

What was that all about?

Just as in 1<sup>st</sup> century Palestine people faced varying emotions at this event, so do we.

What does the miracle of the feeding of the multitude have to do with us in SA in the 21<sup>st</sup> century? What does it have to say to Christians today?

What has this story to do with hospitality? Is it just the feeding of people? Is it just that Jesus feed 5000 people and we need to be hospitable and feed crowds too? This story is related in each of the 4 gospels. Matthew and tells us that the disciples were told by Jesus to sit the men in groups of 50. To make 5000 there must have been 100 groups of men. Actually it was many more than 5000. Matthew and tells us that there were 5000 men, not counting women and children. Some estimate the crowd to be 10,000 or more. Women and children did not eat with me in those days. Men were served first and women ate what was left over. The feeding of the multitude in all four gospels relates that **all** were fed and satisfied and that there were 12 baskets of food left over!

So what is the point of this miracle for us?

Is it that Jesus made more bread and fish from the little that was given to him? Or did his breaking of the bread and fish and sharing it encourage others to share theirs with those around them? Or is it a mixture of both?

Personally I believe that the majority of the crowd had come out and had no food with them. The other gospels inform us that it was dusk, at the end of the day. Even if people had brought food with them they would have most probably eaten it by the end of the day. Of course if people did share what they had that is also a miracle but, I believe that Jesus who had no trouble healing lepers, making the lame to walk, the blind to see and making 12 gallons of wine from water would have no difficulty in making food multiply to feed a multitude with surplus of 12 baskets full left over to boot!

So what can we learn about our walk with Jesus from this story?

I believe that this story is here for several reasons (and more than I have found besides!)

**Firstly we learn about how to act as followers of Jesus:**

The feeding of the multitude happened just after John the Baptist's tragic wasteful murder. Jesus was upset as were his disciples. Possibly they were alarmed that they might be next on Herod's most wanted list. Jesus suggests that they go away from the crowd for a while to regroup. **But**...He sees the crowd coming and Mark's gospel says that Jesus had compassion on them because they were like sheep without a shepherd. The word used here is greater than compassion. It means to feel so deeply and earnestly for others that it is a physical reaction. Jesus felt such a strong reaction of compassion and pity for the crowd that it was greater than his own grief at the death of his cousin. So deep that was greater than his fear of loss of his own life. So great that it was bigger than his own tiredness. Jesus put the needs of others before his own.

I think that this is here to remind us to serve one another, to prefer one another. The Matthew Henry commentary on this says that:

Read quote

We need to be always on the look-out for the needs of others and to act with compassion.

### **Secondly we can learn why we need to follow Jesus:**

The feeding of the crowd was to allow those who were fed to be physically satisfied as the Children of Israel were when they were fed manna in the wilderness. This was a miracle to point them to who Jesus really was: the son of God.

### **Thirdly we need to know what to do as followers of Jesus.**

We tend to think of eating and drinking and other human activities as less than spiritual. I believe that the miracles of feeding large crowds, turning water into wine are to remind us that God is in the everyday activities that we undertake. It is important to him that we are fed, watered, clothed and well. And not just us, every one in the world. His business is our business. As Christians it's our job to ensure that the hungry are fed, the thirsty get clean water and the sick are healed. That's why we assist people who don't have what we have. This is hospitality. Gathering up the left overs is important too. What Jesus provides for us we need to pass onto others. This is in the physical sense of food shelter and clothing as well as the spiritual. Others need to hear the good news that we have.

To conclude I would like to read a portion from Megan McKenna's "Not counting Women and Children":

Read quote.

In closing today let me quickly recap.

From this story alone we learn about how to act as followers of Jesus, why we need to follow Jesus and what actions we take as followers of Jesus.

We are to share a simple lunch after church today. Rather than line up to get our own lunch I would like to suggest that the leadership come to the counter after the benediction and that they in turn will serve every one. So if all but the leadership remains in their seats and you will be served first course and then you can line up and have sweets and eat in Polden Hall while the youth music group do their practice.

Let us pray.

Jesus we thank you for the example that you have given us of how to follow you. Most of all we thank you that this impossible task is only possible by your grace and infilling of your spirit into our lives. Please forgive us when we get it wrong, sometimes deliberately, some times by accident. Help us to grow into the disciples that you want us to be, full of compassion and grace.

Amen