

Discipleship in the Lectionary - 08/06/2023



A look at the week's lectionary through the lens of discipleship and disciple-making.

Revised Common Lectionary Year A

Sunday, August 6th

Matthew 14:13-21

Scripture quotations are from The ESV® Bible (The Holy Bible, English Standard Version®), copyright © 2001 by Crossway, a publishing ministry of Good News Publishers. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

You give them something to eat!

Reminiscent of Elisha's feeding miracle in 2 Kings 4:42-44 and the manna in the wilderness (Exodus 16), the lectionary text is Matthew's version of the feeding of the five thousand. This event occurs on the heels of Herod's birthday banquet at which John the Baptist ends up being killed. Two kings, two banquets and two kingdoms. What a contrast between the kingdoms of the world versus the Kingdom of God's reign on earth.

Matthew 14:13-21 Commentary

In 14:1-2 Herod hears reports of Jesus and concludes He is John the Baptist raised from the dead. The intrigue and scheming that led to the death of John the Baptist at Herod's birthday party are revealed in vv.3-11. In v.12, Jesus learns of John's death. We must assume there is a similar threat hanging over Jesus.

¹³ Now when Jesus heard this, he withdrew from there in a boat to a desolate place by himself. But when the crowds heard it, they followed him on foot from the towns. ¹⁴ When he went ashore he saw a great crowd, and he had compassion on them and healed their sick.

When Jesus heard of the death of John from John's disciples (v.12), He took a boat across the lake to a desolate place by himself. Jesus needed time alone with God. The crowds would have seen where Jesus was heading and gone around the lake on foot, bringing more with them. Jesus found thousands of people when He went ashore. Despite His own need for solitude, we read two things about Jesus that are important. First, He had compassion on the crowds. Second, He healed their sick (*arrōstos* = invalid). It was not until later in the evening He took care of His own needs (14:23).

¹⁵ Now when it was evening, the disciples came to him and said, "This is a desolate place, and the day is now over; send the crowds away to go into the villages and buy food for themselves."

The disciples also express compassion and concern for the crowd as they urge Jesus to send them back into the villages to buy food. The disciples must have been hungry also, yet they also must have been concerned for Jesus who had lost track of time. The disciples were thinking practically and compassionately. They still had much to learn about faith.

¹⁶ But Jesus said, "They need not go away; you give them something to eat."

Jesus, however, challenges the disciples to feed the crowds: "YOU (emphatic) give them something to eat."

¹⁷ They said to him, "We have only five loaves here and two fish."¹⁸ And he said, "Bring them here to me."

The response from the disciples is quite reasonable as they take stock of their resources yet Jesus proceeds as though He will be the provider. The disciples had miscounted. They only saw seven items of food. The eighth item was Jesus the Bread of Life.

¹⁹ Then he ordered the crowds to sit down on the grass, and taking the five loaves and the two fish, he looked up to heaven and said a blessing. Then he broke the loaves and gave them to the disciples, and the disciples gave them to the crowds.

Jesus orders the crowds to sit (*anaklinō* = recline at table). The word choice here suggests this is a more formal occasion – not just food but a foretaste of the Messianic banquet. Jesus gives thanks to God and thus there is no mistaking the authority and source of this miracle. The mechanics are not clear of how the multiplication occurred, but Jesus involved His disciples in this process. It must have involved a test of their faith.

The actions here by Jesus, *took, blessed, broke* and *gave* are found almost identically with minor variations in all six Gospel accounts of the two miraculous feedings, that of the Emmaus meal, and also in all four accounts of the Last Supper (including 1 Corinthians 11:23–24).¹

²⁰ And they all ate and were satisfied. And they took up twelve baskets full of the broken pieces left over.

The people ate until they were satisfied. God provided more than was needed but nothing was wasted. Some point to the twelve baskets remaining as symbolic of the twelve tribes of Israel.

²¹ And those who ate were about five thousand men, besides women and children.

The sheer scale of this event is staggering. There are five thousand men plus all the women and children.

Reflections and Application

Who was this miracle primarily for? Was it for the benefit of the crowd or the disciples? The crowd got an abundant meal. I am sure those who were healed that day and those who witnessed the healing would have gladly missed a meal. The disciples learned a lesson in faith. Was this more about feeding or training? Or both? For the disciples, the situation was a problem. For God it was an opportunity. The mathematics in this story are:

$$(5 + 2 + 1) \times 12 = >5,000$$

No, this is not Common Core math! Five loaves, two fishes, one Jesus and twelve disciples fed over five thousand people. The disciples, however, saw only the five loaves, two fishes and >5,000 people. They miscounted. As modern disciples are we also often guilty of miscounting? Sometimes we rely solely on our own efforts and thus miss the "1." Other times we place our trust in the Lord but forget that He puts us to work! We are the hands and feet – hence multiplication. With faith, whatever we have is sufficient. There will be an abundance but no waste.

There are many with naturalistic presuppositions who cannot accept this was a miracle. They go to great lengths to rationalize it, in some cases requiring more faith than to accept the miracle. Recognizing the miracle of the passage raises our awareness of God's constant provision for our daily needs.

In today's worldly kingdom modeled on Herod, millions starve despite excess. In the Kingdom of God's reign on earth, this miracle is repeated daily through the food pantries of churches and various other feeding ministries that take Jesus at His Word: "YOU give them something to eat!"

For feedback or be added or removed from the mailing list, please e-mail david.r.lyons@gmail.com

¹ R. T. France, *Matthew: An Introduction and Commentary*, vol. 1 (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1985), 240.