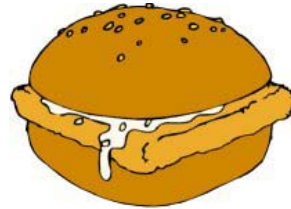


“I’d like 5,000 Fish Sandwiches, Please”

Susan Verstraete

Can you think of a time when you heard some horrible news? Maybe you heard that some trip or event you had been looking forward to was canceled, or maybe you heard that a pet died. I remember how awful I felt in second grade when my best friend told me she was moving away. I ran into my room to cry and be alone. I didn’t want anyone around me. I think it must be how Jesus and the disciples felt when they heard some very bad news about John the Baptist.



Jesus and His disciples had been very busy. People were coming to them at all hours of the day, asking Jesus and His disciples questions, asking Jesus to heal their sick and listening to Him teach. The Bible says that the disciples didn’t even have time to eat their meals! But when John’s friends came and told everyone that John the Baptist had been killed by King Herod, Jesus knew that His disciples needed some time to rest and to be alone. He asked them to get into a boat, and they all sailed across the Sea of Galilee to a desert area where no one lived.

Can you imagine what the crowd must have been feeling as they watched Jesus sail away? Perhaps there was a mom who was bringing her sick baby to Jesus to be healed. How might she feel as Jesus and the disciples got on the boat? Maybe there was a man in the crowd who had heard someone say that Jesus might be the Messiah everyone was waiting for, the one who would bring freedom to the people. Imagine that he traveled from a nearby city to hear Jesus teach, and arrived just as the boat was pulling away from shore. What might he be feeling? Others in the crowd might have been excited to see Jesus heal the sick, or curious to see what else He could do. How might they feel as they watched the boat head out onto the sea?

The crowd probably waited to see where the little boat would stop and saw it come to rest on the shore in a desert place. Perhaps one person thought, “I think I can walk to that place,” and started off. Then more and more people must have realized what the first man was doing and gradually the whole crowd was hurrying along the shore to the place where Jesus and the disciples were resting.

When Jesus saw all the people coming, do you think He was angry that they followed Him? No, the Bible says that Jesus had compassion on them. That means

He felt sorry for them. He healed their sick and taught everyone until very late in the afternoon.

In fact, it was so late that the disciples came to Jesus and asked Him to send the people away. “This is a desolate place, and the day is now over,” they said. “Send the crowds away to go into the villages and buy food for themselves.” But Jesus had a different plan. “They need not go away,” He said. “You give them something to eat.”

How surprised the disciples must have been! There were 5,000 men, plus women and children in the crowd. How could the disciples possibly feed them? They couldn’t go to a drive up window and say, “I’d like 5,000 fish sandwiches, please,” like we might if we were very rich. They couldn’t even go to a nearby village to buy food, because it would cost nearly a year’s wages to feed all those people. All they had were five small loaves of bread and two fish—just enough for one person’s hearty lunch.

Jesus told everyone to sit down in small groups, and He asked God the Father to bless the food. Then Jesus broke the bread into pieces and gave it to the disciples to pass out. First He broke off enough pieces to feed five people, then enough to feed ten. The disciples were amazed as He continued to break off enough food to feed twenty, fifty, and then a hundred people. And He just kept going! Jesus kept breaking the bread and the fish, but there was always more bread and more fish. The five small loaves and two fish turned into enough food for all the people to eat until they were full—perhaps 10,000 to 15,000 men, women and children. The disciples were even able to pick up 12 baskets full of leftovers!

I’m so glad this story was included in the Bible because of what it teaches us about Jesus. Most importantly, it teaches us that Jesus is God. Only God could feed more than five thousand people with so little food, and even have leftovers! But it also shows us that Jesus has compassion for (feels kindly toward) those who are sick or hungry. It shows us that He never gets angry when people come to Him.

So if you come to Jesus in prayer and by trusting Him, he will patiently teach you, just like He did these people. And if you ask Him to heal your sin-sickness, He will have compassion on you, just as He did for the sick people in this crowd. Jesus will never get angry or feel bothered when we come to Him in prayer. He is never too busy to help us. Aren’t you glad for the powerful, kind God we serve?