

Semicontinuous

2 Sam. 11:1–15

Ps. 14

Complementary

2 Kgs. 4:42–44

Ps. 145:10–18

Eph. 3:14–21

John 6:1–21

Enough

Goal for the Session Youth will follow the example of the young boy and offer gifts to God for a greater purpose.

■ PREPARING FOR THE SESSION

Focus on John 6:1–21

WHAT is important to know?

— From “Exegetical Perspective,” Robert A. Bryant

The people, however, do not fully understand either the significance of the moment or Jesus’ identity. They see in Jesus the fulfillment of Deuteronomy 18:15–18, and they may connect this feeding to Elisha (2 Kgs. 4:42) and even Elijah (Mal. 4:5), but the significance of this feeding miracle runs deeper. God promised the arrival of a Messiah who would satisfy the people’s needs for food and justice (see Pss. 37:19; 81:10, 16; 132:15–17; Ezek. 34:15–16), even as he inaugurated a new exodus into the freedom of God’s rule (see Isa. 40:3–11; 49:8–13; etc.). So when the people move to make Jesus a king rather than worship him as Lord, he slips away.

WHERE is God in these words?

— From “Theological Perspective,” Douglas John Hall

What is truly awe-inspiring is not that someone could walk on the surface of the water without sinking, but that his presence among ordinary, insecure, and timid persons could calm their anxieties and cause *them* to walk where they feared to walk before—in the end, all the way to their own Golgothas. What is genuinely miraculous is not that a dead body should come to life again, but that through the journey with the crucified one, the disciple community was enabled to find hope on the far side of despair, faith that could live with doubt, and the courage to live beyond the sting of death.

SO WHAT does this mean for our lives?

— From “Pastoral Perspective,” Karen Marie Yust

Faith communities also need to balance periods of intense social ministry with times of internal reflection on God’s call. Spiritual introspection in response to social approval helps congregations remain faithful to Christ when alternative interpretations of their work threaten to overwhelm their true purposes. Congregations can develop a communal process of evaluation and discernment that examines their ministries for congruence with the church’s created end as a reverent and exuberant servant of God.

NOW WHAT is God’s word calling us to do?

— From “Homiletical Perspective,” Cheryl Bridges Johns

Our congregations are filled with people who have grown accustomed to facing overwhelming need: Katrina, tsunamis, and on and on. It is easy to look at the sheer magnitude of need and in light of small resources ask, “What are they among so many?” It is easy to come to the end of knowledge and in that place to despair. In the “prayers of the people,” we place before the Lord the great needs of humanity. We may find echoing back the words, “What do you have?” Whatever we have is not enough. Yet, as this text points out, the “not enough” is not the final answer. When placed in the hands of Jesus, human weakness and finitude become more than enough.

FOCUS SCRIPTURE

John 6:1–21

YOU WILL NEED

- newsprint
- markers
- Bibles
- copies of Resource Sheet 1
- pens or pencils

For Responding

- option 1: copies of Resource Sheet 2, music player, contemplative music
- option 2: newsprint, markers
- option 3: assortment of magazines and pictures (general interest, news, and church publications), scissors, glue, poster board

For Web Connection

- computer with Internet access

It's possible, of course, that no one will be familiar with Jesus' miraculous feedings. If so, no problem—just give thanks that the youth will get to learn something new and move on to the reading and exploration of the passage.

Focus on Your Teaching

Young people can be generous to a fault. They are learning that they have power to decide where to devote their energies and resources, and they are often willing to give heroically. They may also be learning, however, that their ability to make a difference in another's life is limited—that they can't save a friend from unwise choices, much less the world. John's account of Jesus feeding the five thousand is a potent reminder that when we surrender our gifts to God—like the boy's meager basket of loaves and fishes—God can use them in ways we can't imagine on our own. Our gifts are enough.

Gracious God, inspire me by your Holy Spirit to teach and lead with patience, understanding, and generosity. In Jesus' name. Amen.

LEADING THE SESSION

GATHERING

Before the session, post four sheets of newsprint around the meeting space and write one of the following prompts on each sheet: "Describe a miracle that you have witnessed." "Describe a miracle that you have performed." "When have you seen God at work in the world?" "When have you given of yourself for the sake of others?"

Welcome the youth as they arrive. Hand out markers and invite the youth to circulate among the posted newsprint sheets, writing their responses to each prompt. When everyone has finished, lead a brief reflection on participants' responses, encouraging the youth to elaborate on surprising or unclear responses. Discuss:

- ✪ What makes a miracle a miracle?
- ✪ Do miracles happen in today's world? How do you know?
- ✪ If God doesn't operate in miracles (anymore), how does God work in the world today?

Explain that, in this session, youth will explore Jesus' miraculous feeding of a crowd of people and what that miracle might mean for their own lives as his followers. Pray:

Loving God, we have gathered today in Jesus' name. Be with us, guide us, and enlighten us as we seek to be faithful followers. Amen.

EXPLORING

Because the Gospels contain multiple accounts, with variations, of Jesus feeding a large crowd, and because this general theme may be familiar to the youth, begin by inviting participants to informally tell the story from memory. If they need prompting, ask:

- ✪ How many people did Jesus feed?
- ✪ How did the disciples suggest dealing with the crowd?
- ✪ Where did the food come from?
- ✪ What happened after everyone had eaten?

Have participants find John 6:1–15 in a Bible and read the passage silently. Then invite a volunteer to read the passage aloud. Lead a discussion of the reading by asking:

- ✧ How is this passage like and unlike your memory of it?
- ✧ What details did you forget?
- ✧ What details were you expecting that are not in this passage?

If necessary, encourage the group to accept that the Gospels all tell somewhat different versions of Jesus' feeding of the crowds and move on to a deeper exploration of John 6:1–15:

- ✧ Why was the crowd following Jesus? What did the people want?
- ✧ Why does Jesus test Philip? Does Philip pass the test? What would you have said in Philip's place?
- ✧ Does the boy voluntarily offer to share his food or does Andrew coerce him? What difference does this make, if any?
- ✧ How do you think Jesus makes the boy's food feed all those people?
- ✧ Why do the people try to make Jesus king?

If you have a large group, divide participants into three teams and assign each team one section of the resource sheet. Otherwise, lead the whole group through the entire resource sheet.

Point out that the people misunderstand who Jesus really is, and give the youth an opportunity to explore that misunderstanding by working through Resource Sheet 1 (Old Testament Prophecies). After everyone has finished working on the resource sheet, summarize the group's findings and discuss the following questions:

- ✧ Assuming that the people knew of the Old Testament prophecies of God's messiah, what do they expect will happen if they make Jesus king?
- ✧ In the "What?" excerpt on page 1, Robert A. Bryant writes that "the people move to make Jesus a king rather than worship him as Lord." What is the difference between "king" and "Lord"?
- ✧ In what ways do we continue to misunderstand who Jesus really is?
- ✧ How does our misunderstanding of Jesus affect the things we do and say as Christians?

Conclude your exploration of John 6:1–15 by focusing more deeply on the boy with the basket of food and inviting the youth to put themselves in his place. Ask:

- ✧ What would have happened if the boy had refused to share his food?
- ✧ How do you think his participation in this miracle changed his life?
- ✧ What difference does it make that God uses the gifts we have to offer to achieve God's purposes in the world today?

RESPONDING

Choose one or more of the following learning activities:

1. **Reflection on Gifts** Youth will reflect on the gifts they have to offer. Distribute copies of Resource Sheet 2 (Your Gifts). Play some soft contemplative music while participants reflect on the readings and questions on the resource sheet. Discuss their insights by asking:
 - ✧ What gifts do you have to share with the world?
 - ✧ What gifts have you discovered today that—like the boy's basket of food—you never before thought of as gifts to share in service to God?
 - ✧ How will you go about using your gifts when you leave this place?

EASY
PREP

2. **Fish Fry** Youth will recognize the gifts and service of their congregation and offer their own gift of gratitude by planning and holding a fish fry. Ask: How might we use the inspiration of Jesus' feeding the five thousand to help the congregation reflect on God's call to serve others with their gifts?

Making notes on a posted sheet of newsprint, brainstorm the following elements of such a project: recruitment of persons with meal planning and cooking expertise, options for paying for the food and supplies, choosing a date and location, securing the necessary permissions, publicity and invitations, covering necessary tasks (preparation, serving the meal, cleanup), program before, during, and/or after the meal, etc. Finally, make plans for further meetings to continue the planning process.

3. **Collage** Youth will reflect on God's call to offer their gifts in service by creating a collage that puts John 6:1–15 in today's terms. Set out magazines and other supplies and invite participants to find and place images that represent Jesus, the disciples, the boy, and the crowd. When the collage is finished, lead a reflection on the group's creation:
- ✧ How does the collage help you understand the Scripture text?
 - ✧ What new challenges does the collage help you see?
 - ✧ What new gifts does the collage help you recognize in yourself and the church?

CLOSING

Gather the group in a seated circle. Invite the youth to listen as you read John 6:1–11. Ask: What loaves and fishes will you offer to God today and from now on? Give participants a minute to reflect on this question, and then go around the circle, inviting all to give their answers in turn. (Those who wish not to speak may pass.)

Thank the youth for their participation and for sharing their God-given gifts; then lead the group in a closing prayer:

We give you thanks, O God, for the crowds who followed Jesus to the mountainside and for their hunger. We give you thanks for the disciples and for their good intentions. We give you thanks for the boy willing to share his loaves and fishes. And we give you thanks for your Son, Jesus, who fed the people long ago and who continues to feed us today. Amen.

■ ENHANCEMENT

WEB CONNECTION

Search YouTube for "Gather Us In" by Marty Haugen (your church's hymnal may contain this song or you may find the lyrics online). Watch the video and explore the following questions:

- ✧ How are those whom God gathers in in the song like the crowd who follows Jesus in John 6:1–15? How are they like us?
- ✧ Where do you see yourself in the song lyrics?
- ✧ According to verse 3, how should we respond to being fed by God?

Old Testament Prophecies



Look up and read Deuteronomy 18:15–18; 2 Kings 4:42–44; and Malachi 4:5.

How do these passages relate to Jesus and his feeding of the crowd?

If the crowd sees Jesus as the fulfillment of these Old Testament prophecies, what else might they expect of him besides food?



Look up and read Psalm 81:10 and Ezekiel 34:15–16.

How do these passages relate to Jesus and his feeding of the crowd?

If the crowd sees Jesus as the fulfillment of these Old Testament prophecies, what else might they expect of him besides food?



Look up and read Isaiah 40:10–11 and Isaiah 49:8–10.

How do these passages relate to Jesus and his feeding of the crowd?

If the crowd sees Jesus as the fulfillment of these Old Testament prophecies, what else might they expect of him besides food?

Your Gifts

love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness,
faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control

Take a moment to read the following passage of Scripture:

There are different spiritual gifts but the same Spirit; and there are different ministries and the same Lord; and there are different activities but the same God who produces all of them in everyone. A demonstration of the Spirit is given to each person for the common good. A word of wisdom is given by the Spirit to one person, a word of knowledge to another according to the same Spirit, faith to still another by the same Spirit, gifts of healing to another in the one Spirit, performance of miracles to another, prophecy to another, the ability to tell spirits apart to another, different kinds of tongues to another, and the interpretation of the tongues to another. All these things are produced by the one and same Spirit who gives what he wants to each person.

—1 Corinthians 12:4–11, CEB

- You may or may not feel that you have any of the gifts Paul lists, but what do you see in yourself that's a gift from the Holy Spirit?
- How do you believe you're meant to use the gifts, skills, abilities, and so on that God has given you?

Now read these additional verses from Scripture:

But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. There is no law against things like this.

—Galatians 5:22–23, CEB

- You may have never thought of these qualities as gifts from God, but which of them do you see in yourself?
- How might you grow the ones you lack and use the ones you have in service to God and others?