

Resourced for the Mission: Leader's Guide

by Rev. Gregory Seltz

From the Missional Bible Studies series of the Center for U.S. Missions

Read Matthew 14:13-21. Key verse: *"As evening approached, the disciples came to him and said, 'This is a remote place; it's already getting late. Send the crowds away, so they can go to the villages and buy some food.' Jesus replied, 'They do not need to go away. You give them something to eat.'"*

Every congregation in mission prayerfully struggles with resources--the people and monies needed for the work of sharing the Gospel. Our text speaks of first things first; namely, our knowing and trusting that Jesus is the source of all that we say and do. The question "Do we have enough resources to do the work Jesus has given us?" should be asked only after we have brought our present resources to Jesus for His blessing. Blessed, then resourced--this is the Christian mission focus.

1. What does this text say about the reality of mission and ministry? See v. 15. What is the "predicament" for the disciples?

The disciples were overwhelmed by the opportunities for ministry that confronted them. They realized they were unprepared and unable to meet the people's most basic expectations.

Matthew records this miracle right after the reports of Jesus being unwelcome in his own hometown and John the Baptist being beheaded. It's as if he is telling us: Ministry is going to be like this--some days feeding 5,000, some days unwelcome in your own home town, and, yes, some days you might even have your head handed to you on a platter!

2. Don't we often find ourselves in similar situations in ministry? Can you name some?

This text describes ministry taking place in the midst of possible trouble, restlessness or discord, through the most unlikely vessels of all, the disciples. The potential for disaster was great. We know what can happen when crowds get restless.

3. What did the disciples do right?

When overwhelmed, they turned to Jesus and said, "Help!" Unfortunately they wanted Jesus to use His authority to send the people away. They also correctly realized that they didn't have the resources in themselves for the work of the Gospel. No amount of money or personnel can do Jesus' work without His resources and blessing.

4. What were the disciples missing? (v. 17) What did they fail to see when all they saw was "a few fish and some loaves?" How does Jesus' statement, "You give them something" shake them up?

The disciples looked at their resources only from their point of view, seeing nothing more than a few fish and loaves. They couldn't see what Jesus could do with them. For the task of serving others in His Name, Jesus looks at us and says, "You can do it." We often answer, "You can't mean me? What can I do?"

Jesus doesn't challenge the disciples to embarrass them. He wants them to realize what they are without Him, in order to see what they can be with Him alone--blessings to others. The same challenge is laid upon us.

5. How Jesus deal with the "resource question" head on (v. 18)? What does this mean for us when dealing with our resource needs for ministry?

He invites them to bring the fish and loaves, their resources, to Him for blessing. He also invites us to bring who and what we are to Him first and foremost, to resource us as vessels of His grace to others. We need to realize that we have enough for the work that He has given us. We need to bring our time, talent and treasure to Him for blessing.

Before we ask for specific resources for our mission work, the first question to be answered is, "Have we brought our present resources to Him for blessing?" Jesus wants us to be the kind of people who joyfully say, "Hey, we've got fish and loaves. Let's see what Jesus can do with them."

6. Jesus provides the resources, but who "delivers" them to the people? (v. 19). What does this tell you about Jesus' desire to bless others through us?

The disciples were the "face" of Jesus to the people as they brought food to the 5,000 (likely 15-20,000 with women and children).

In Philippians 3:7-11, Paul talks about knowing even more deeply the power of the resurrection, the fellowship of sharing in Jesus' sufferings. Such things are experienced as we seek to share Christ's love with others. Jesus himself speaks of that joy in Hebrews 12:1-2, a joy willing to even take on the cross for us. When Jesus calls us to serve others in His name, we are invited to sense the same joy.

7. For mission, why is it important to realize that Jesus is not our hero, but our Savior?

Heroes do great things, but they dominate; they win at all cost. They make other people realize that they are the winners and you are not. In this reading, we see that Jesus is not our hero; He is our Savior. Jesus invites us into His excellence, His forgiveness, His love and salvation so that we can be such vessels to others (see 2 Cor. 4:5-12).

Jesus our Savior could dominate us with ease. Instead, He stoops to serve; comes into our flesh, washes our feet, dies on our cross, and gives us his life! He is a Savior willing to proclaim salvation, reconciliation, hope and peace, through broken vessels like us.

8. What does it mean to our mission that Jesus can work through us as we are?

Jesus calls people to ministry, to service, to be proclaimers of His reconciliation and cosmic redemption. He ultimately is the message and the power (resource) for us in our mission work for others.

The greatness of the Christian message is the potential it proclaims for human beings! To be redeemed children of the Almighty God, to be made in his image and redeemed by his life, death and resurrection means that we are blessed to be a blessing. In Jesus, such things are true of us so that we might serve others with confidence and joy.

This is not some modern belief in self, but the truth of a Savior Jesus, who because of who He is and what He has done, believes in you! With that being true, even our inadequacies might be strengths in serving others.

Jesus says, "Bring me your fish/loaves; bring me your voices, your minds, your arms, your legs; your time, talent and treasure; your lives in service to your community, to your friends, to your enemies . . . and watch what I will do with you! And if you need more, just ask!"

October 2007. Rev. Gregory Seltz is Director of the Cross Cultural Ministry Center, Concordia University, Irvine, California. Accompanying Participant's Guide is also available from the Center for U.S. Missions.