

Mark 6:30-46; John 6:1-13

Aim of lesson

To show how Jesus cared for the people, and miraculously fed them.

Background study

Matthew 4:12. Study information about food in New Testament times. Find the equivalent of a denarius in modern currency.

Suggested outline of lesson

Find a visual aid

This story will probably be very familiar to the class and, therefore, may need a fresh approach. Consider telling the main part of the story through the eyes of the boy referred to in John's account. The children will readily associate themselves with the boy's feelings. A useful visual aid would be five bread rolls and two sardines or pilchards, to be produced at the right moment in the story.

Jesus shepherding the people

First set the scene by explaining that Jesus was both tired and hungry, having been beset by crowds all day and having been too busy to eat. Furthermore, the disciples needed to talk to him alone, and to tell him all that they had been doing in his name. In addition, Jesus had just learned of the death of John the Baptist (Matthew 4:12) which added to his desire for solitude. However, it was not to be. Try to convey in some way the number five thousand, by comparing it with school assembly or a large crowd at a football match (which the class will no doubt have seen on TV).

Despite his desire to be alone, Jesus felt such compassion for those who were "like sheep without a shepherd" that he put their needs before his own. The disciples had learned something from Jesus about concern for others, as can be seen by their suggestion in verse 36: "This is a lonely place, and the hour is now late ..." "You give them something to eat," said Jesus to test their reactions. Their response to this challenge was a purely human one, that of offering to shop for some food.

From the young lad's point of view . . .

It is at this point that the story can be continued as if told by the boy. Effect the change with words such as: In the crowd was a young boy who was watching events with interest. He might have told his friends about them later in words something like this: "I was actually there that day, and standing so near to Jesus that I could hear what he and his friends were saying. I thought to myself, I've still got my lunch - I had been too excited to eat it - "I could share that. Let's see what my mother packed up for me ..." At this point, the "packed lunch" can be opened up.

Thanks to our generous God

Make a point of incorporating in the story the fact that Jesus gave us here the example - as he did on several occasions - of giving thanks for food. The boy must have watched with amazement as his little meal stretched into a seemingly endless supply of food, and the disciples would have been no less amazed. Note that the enormous crowd was satisfied not only spiritually, but physically, too, and there were still leftovers. God is always generous - "good measure, pressed down, shaken together, running over" (Luke 6:38). It is astounding that the amount of food left over was far more than the original meal. What a memorable day it had been for those who shared in that feast of good things.

Relevance to the children's lives

In this story, Jesus prayed twice. When? We pray for food in the Lord's Prayer ("Give us this day ..."). What good prayer habits should we adopt, if we are to follow Jesus' example?

At last Jesus was able to be quite alone, so that he could talk to God. No doubt he thanked his Father for enabling him to help so many.

Worksheets

The code reads 'Jesus gave thanks and broke the loaves'.

The Bible sum is $8 + 12 = 20 \times 5 = 100 \times 2 = 200 - 100 = 100 \times 50 = 5000$.

Prayer

Here it may be suitable to say one of the well-known "grace" prayers. (The bread and fish, which may have been used as a visual aid, may perhaps be eaten by the children afterwards). For example:

Thank you, Lord, for all your care.
Close about us everywhere.
Bless people near and far away
Who help to bring us food each day. Amen.

Memory verse

"Do not be anxious, saying, 'What shall we eat?' or 'What shall we drink?' or 'What shall we wear?' For the Gentiles seek after all these things; and your heavenly Father knows that you need them all" (Matthew 6:31-32).