

Feeding 5,000 in Bethsaida

Robb McCoy

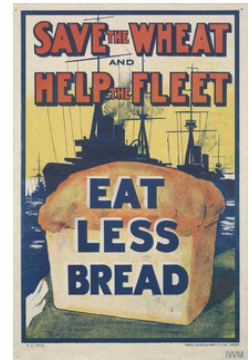
A parable: Two people went to a pizza party. The first person thought that there might not be enough for everybody, so they took only one piece. The second person took three pieces for the exact same reason.

Scarcity is a difficult thing to deal with. It can drive people to generosity or fear. When people fear that there might not be enough to go around, things can get dicey. That is why the disciples told Jesus to “send the crowds away.” There was a crowd of people that day in the plain of Bethsaida. 5,000 men implied that there were even more people. The disciples knew that most people are 3-piece people, and that when people started to get hungry, there could be problems.

Yet Jesus told them, “you give them something to eat.” For centuries people have debated what happened in that field with the five loaves of bread and two fish. Was there a divine multiplication of matter. Were the laws of nature suspended while bread and fish materialized from nothing? Or were people convinced by the teaching of Jesus to become one-piece people all at once. Were they so inspired by the love and generosity of Jesus that they shared with one another and found that there was actually enough food to have 12 baskets of leftovers?

I’m not sure the ‘how’ of the story matters. Either scenario is miraculous, and I’m not sure we need to choose which was right. What matters is this: with Jesus, there was enough bread to feed 5,000 men. This was the public culmination of the Galilean ministry of Jesus. For the last few weeks we have been talking about how Jesus revealed himself to the people.

Each story has revealed his mission, his teaching, and his healing power. He has mastered the storms, cast out demons, raised a Centurion’s daughter and a widow’s son. He was reached beyond the borders of Galilee and sent Legion into the sea. Word has spread. People want to hear more. As we read this passage we see that Herod is confused - and that he has killed John the Baptist. His violent act requires a response and Jesus stands with 5,000 well-fed men and clearly the power to do it again if needed.



Posters from World War I extol the virtue of saving bread for the war effort. Rationing was a civic duty during both world wars. Sun Tzu, author of The Art of War, talked about the importance of supplying the army in chapter 2 and many other places in his famous work.

For thousands of years military men have known the truism that Katherine Anne Porter wrote in a story about World War I “Bread will win the war.” It was true during both world wars. It was true to Sun Tzu, the author of *The Art of War*, and it was true to Roman Julius Caesar, whose famed “war bread” helped keep his army’s morale up during the civil war the led him to power.

The best way to defeat an army was to starve it, and Rome knew that the true power of their Legions was the supply lines that kept them fed. Remember the Legion from last week - the basic unit of the Roman army was approximately 5,000 men.

That’s right. Jesus had a Legion of well-fed men - and he just heard about the violent murder of John the Baptist at the hand of Herod. But what kind of Legion did Jesus have? He did not have a Legion armed with sword and spear. He had a Legion armed with ideas and grace. His army was a love army, and he was getting ready to march to Jerusalem, not as a conquering hero, but as a loving savior.

We gather here in the face of a Legion of tormentors. It is easy to fall into the fear of scarcity and thoughts that “we are not enough.” I came here to remind you that with Christ, we have enough. With Christ, we are enough. We are a Legion armed with the spirit and truth. We strengthen each other - as one-piece people and with miraculous feats of endurance. We have enough to march with Jesus to the Cross, and declare that Kingdom of God is at hand.