

CONTEXTUAL BIBLE READING

Grape Team South Africa

March 2025



THEME: HOW SHALL WE FEED THE PEOPLE?



Scripture Reading: John 6:1-14 - Jesus feeds the Five Thousand

1 Some time after this, Jesus crossed to the far shore of the Sea of Galilee (that is, the Sea of Tiberias), 2 and a great crowd of people followed him because they saw the signs he had performed by healing the sick. 3 Then Jesus went up on a mountainside and sat down with his disciples. 4 The Jewish Passover Festival was near. 5 When Jesus looked up and saw a great crowd coming toward him, he said to Philip, “Where shall we buy bread for these people to eat?” 6 He asked this only to test him, for he already had in mind what he was going to do. 7 Philip answered him, “It would take more than half a year’s wages to buy enough bread for each one to have a bite!” 8 Another of his disciples, Andrew, Simon Peter’s brother, spoke up, 9 “Here is a boy with five small barley loaves and two small fish, but how far will they go among so many?” 10 Jesus said, “Have the people sit down.” There was plenty of grass in that place, and they sat down (about five thousand men were there). 11 Jesus then took the loaves, gave thanks, and distributed to those who were seated as much as they wanted. He did the same with the fish. 12 When they had all had enough to eat, he said to his disciples, “Gather the pieces that are left over. Let nothing be wasted.” 13 So they gathered them and filled twelve baskets with the pieces of the five barley loaves left over by those who had eaten. 14 After the people saw the sign Jesus performed, they began to say, “Surely this is the Prophet who is to come into the world.”

NOTES TO THE FACILITATOR:



- ❖ It is important to make copies of the text for all participants for two reasons. So that everyone works with the same text during the discernment phase, and so that participants can make notes as the pericope is read and discussed.
- ❖ It is recommended that the facilitator reads at least three different versions of the pericope and familiarises him-/herself with the main differences. The three versions can even be part of the copied text and read at the start of the Discernment part

DISCERNING GOD'S WILL



For the Facilitator: Background to the Gospel of John

The Gospel of John is one of the four Gospels that narrate the life, ministry, and death of Jesus Christ. However, it stands out in its unique approach to storytelling compared to the Gospels of Matthew, Mark, and Luke. While all three Gospels begin with Jesus's birth, John takes a different starting point.

John begins his narrative at the very beginning of creation, as recorded in Genesis. This framing influences the entire story of Jesus, shaping his understanding of Jesus's ministry and emphasising themes that are not even mentioned in the first three Gospels.

When reading the Gospel of John or any part of the book, it's important to consider this unique approach. Only John connects Jesus's advent to the creation, as seen in John 1. He also includes the story of the wedding at Canaan in Galilee (John 2), where Jesus performs his first miracle—turning water into wine. This miracle, like the others, is connected to the creation of something new.

John's parables, such as the Shepherd (John 10) and the Parable of the Vine (John 15), and the priestly prayer of Jesus (John 17), also highlight themes of belonging, inclusion, and unity. These stories and parables, along with other textual critical information, should be taken into account when reading the Gospel of John, particularly John 6, which recounts the feeding of the five thousand men.

WE READ AND LISTEN TO JOHN 6:1-14 TOGETHER



The Devotional facilitator guides the group through reading the scripture once. After a brief pause, the facilitator allows the group to read the scripture again in silence.

... standing in front of the text.

The facilitator leads the group in reflecting on the question:

What is the text/scripture reading all about?

Notes to the Facilitator:

- *This is the question that usually sparks a lively discussion.*
- *The facilitator should allow as much discussion as possible here.*

... standing in the text.

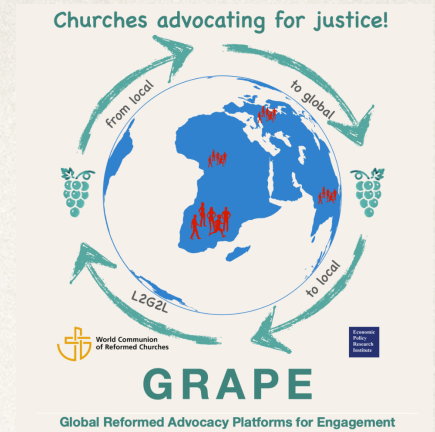
Character analysis: After all responses and inputs have been received, acknowledged, and listed, the facilitator guides the group to delve deeper by analysing the characters in the passage with the questions:

- *Who are the characters in the story and what does the text say about them?*
- *Are there any connections and/or power relations at play between the characters?*

Other questions the facilitator can put to the group for table discussion and to report back on:

- *What insights can we gain from the two perspectives (schools of thought) on Jesus's instruction to the disciples to provide food to the crowd?*
- *Does the precise location and the approaching Jewish festival of Passover hold any significance or influence on the unfolding and conclusion of the feeding story?*
- *Is this a genuine historical account or a miraculous event, and what implications does it have for us if it were either a lived experience or a divine intervention?*

WE READ AND LISTEN TO JOHN 6:1-14 TOGETHER



We reflect together and listen to each other by...

... standing behind the text.

During this phase of discernment, the focus shifts to the connections between characters, the significance of status, class, and background in the text, the importance of place names, power dynamics, and other relevant factors.

Questions to continue the conversation:

- *Does status, class and background play a role in the story/text?*
- *Are there any power relations at play and how should it be understood?*
- *Does the location of the story have any significance in relation to the story or the characters?*

... standing in front of the text.

Here the facilitator invites the group to stand in front of the text again and discuss the question:

- *Is there a connection between the theme, the context of the story and the contemporary context of the group?*
- *Do we experience today what happened in the story/text and in what way?*
- *What does it mean for us today if this was not a miracle but an exemplary deed sharing from what you have by Christ Jesus? Is this something we can emulate today as well?*

ACT - DISCERNING ACTION STEPS WE CAN TAKE...



This is the last phase of the CBS. Here the facilitator leads the group discussion in answering the last set of questions:

- ❖ What is God asking from us in the light of what we have discovered?
- ❖ What short-, medium-, and long-term actions can be taken, together and individually, from what we have learnt?
- ❖ What immediate steps can be taken to address the challenge from what we have discovered from the first (SEE) and the second (DISCERNMENT) phase?

ACT - DISCERNING ACTION STEPS WE CAN TAKE...



- ❖ Further important pointers for the ACT part:
- ❖ Coordinating the implementation of this part is critical, hence we suggest that a
- ❖ Coordination and Implementation team (CET) is agreed upon that will ensure that the action plan is executed as planned
- ❖ The CET will also call the whole CBS team together for the evaluation of the outcomes and to assess the impact of the action plan.