



BIBLE STUDY

HUNGRY HEARTS

by Audrey Novak Riley

Introduction

We all know the story: A crowd of people follows Jesus out to the countryside, and by the time evening rolls around they're all hungry. The disciples tell Jesus to send the people away so they can go get supper in town, and he answers, "You give them something to eat."

All four gospels give us this story. Three of them give us the command from Jesus in exactly the same words: "You give them something to eat" (Matthew 14:16; Mark 6:37; Luke 9:13). Is Jesus talking to *us*?

Hymn

"We Come to the Hungry Feast" *Evangelical Lutheran Worship* 479

Prayer

*Blessed are you, O Lord our God,
who brought forth all creation with
a word.*

You give us food for another day:

Blessed are you forever!

*We beg you to pour out food for all
who hunger*

this day and always

that all peoples may praise you

in every language,

through your Son, Jesus Christ,

who lives and reigns with you

and the Holy Spirit,

One God for ever and ever.

Amen.

Satisfaction at the Table

Have you ever had a really satisfying meal? I mean *really* satisfying, the kind that doesn't just nourish your body but delights your mind and your heart and your soul? What was it like? Who was there? Where was it, and what was that place like?

I can describe a meal like that—it was a recent Thanksgiving at my house. Some old friends were in town and my husband and I were delighted to have them join us at our table. My husband made dinner (he's a really good cook), and I got

out the wedding china and set the table as prettily as I know how. We prayed together, we ate, we talked about what we were thankful for, we caught up on everyone's news, and then after dinner, we lingered over coffee and talked some more. We had plenty of leftovers to send home with our friends, and even so, we still had enough for turkey sandwiches and pumpkin pie the next day. It was a deeply satisfying experience.

Let's Talk About It

1. What do you think made that experience so satisfying?
2. When did you have a meal that satisfying? What was it like? Tell the person next to you about it.
3. How did that meal satisfy your mind? Your heart? Your soul?

People on the Edge

Now let's turn to the gospel according to Matthew, chapter 14, where we'll hear about another very satis-

ying meal. As we listen, let's keep in mind what's been going on. King Herod has beheaded John the Baptist. On receiving the news of the murder of his cousin and forerunner, Jesus gets into a boat with his disciples, hoping to have some time alone, maybe hoping to lie low until the king calms down—but the many other people who had loved and honored their prophet John leave their homes and villages and wait for Jesus on the shore.

As the text is read aloud, imagine yourself in the scene as one of the many townspeople who have gone out to the water's edge to wait for Jesus.

READ MATTHEW 14:13–16.

Let's Talk About It

4. John the Baptist was important to you and your family and friends. What are your emotions as you hear of his death?
5. When you leave your house to wait for Jesus on the shore, what are you hoping for?

The Scripture is silent on what was going through the people's minds and hearts at this moment, but we can imagine that they were not only filled with grief, they were horrified. Their scandalous ruler Herod had murdered the prophet who had been foretold centuries before by Isaiah, the prophet who had called them to confess their sins and be baptized for repentance, for God's reign was very near (read Matthew 3:1–11). (See "A Wild and Crazy Guy," p. 18.)

The people had high expectations of their kings, always remembering how God had favored King David (read Psalm 89:19–29). And this disgraceful excuse for a ruler had vilely murdered their own prophet—God's own prophet! Disappointment is far too mild a word for what the people must have felt. What an appalling end for the prophet. What a brutal insult to the people and to their faith. And there was nothing they could do about it. Herod was backed by the power of Rome.

What Jesus Tells the People

So the crowd huddles around Jesus, who has compassion on them. The gospel also tells us that he heals their sick—and it wouldn't be too much of a stretch to imagine that he comforts the heartsick and grief-stricken as well.

When the disciples point out that it's getting late, he tells them to give the people something to eat and has them bring what little food they have to him. Then he tells the people to sit down on the grass. The evangelist's Greek word translated here as "sit down" is actually *anaklinos*—to lean back, to recline. That's what we're going to take a closer look at today.

Why does Jesus tell the people to stretch out on the grass? It must be significant. What could it mean?

For that, we have to look to the culture around Jesus and his neighbors.

The Greeks (and then the Romans) who had ruled that corner of the world for centuries loved dinner parties, which they called symposiums or conviviums (or, to be precise, *symposia* and *convivia*). They held banquets for occasions sacred and secular, large and small. Families, neighborhood associations, religious groups, nobles and their followers—everyone loved dinner parties. People even formed clubs whose purpose was to hold banquets and share the expenses.

In that culture, the ideal dinner party was a gathering of equals, coming together to enjoy not only good food and fine wine in pleasant surroundings, but most importantly, the pleasure of each other's company and conversation. But dinner parties meant much more than just fun with friends and families. That pleasure, the joy shared around the table, was a sacred thing in that culture. It was the presence of the divine.

Likewise, Jesus' own Jewish people had a centuries-long tradition of coming together to celebrate with food and drink and conversation and prayer. The Passover feast that Jews still celebrate today goes all the way back to Old Testament times, more than a thousand years

before Jesus' time. Neither the Jews' nor the Greeks' banquets looked like the dinner parties we see on the TV show "Downton Abbey," with elegantly dressed men and women sitting side by side around a long table, with the host and hostess at either end and silent servants standing behind. (Thanks to the wonders of the Internet, you can read Emily Post's elaborate rules for hosting dinner parties and give yourself the shivers.)

No, the dinner parties that Jesus' friends and neighbors knew went like this: The host would have the servants arrange a few backless, armless couches (think of beach lounges or futons) end to end in a U shape. Each couch would have a low table next to it where servants would place food and wine for each guest. As the guests entered, servants would wash their feet and others would show them to their places. The guests would stretch out on their couches, reclining on their left sides, leaning on their elbows, supported by cushions.

Both Jews and Greeks saw a very special meaning in that reclining posture: That was how free people ate. That was how noble people ate. Servants ate seated so that they could act quickly if their masters called. Children ate sitting on their parents' couches at their feet; a student would honor a teacher by sitting on the end of the teacher's couch at his feet. Reclining was a position of honor.

That meaning is actually enshrined in the Jewish people's Talmud, the commentary on the Scripture that was first written down not long after Jesus' time, codifying traditions and practices that had already been in place for generations, if not centuries. At the Passover feast, the celebration of God leading the people out of slavery, all Jews, rich or poor or middling, are to recline at table as the free people God chose them to be.

By having the people recline to eat, Jesus is telling them that no matter how their ruler had grieved and insulted them by murdering their beloved prophet John, they are still the free and noble people God had chosen them to be, and the people would have

understood what he was telling them. He is doing the opposite of what Herod had done—Jesus is treating the people and their faith and traditions with respect. By sending his disciples among them as servants at a feast, he is treating the people as honored guests. (See "Taste and See," p. 12.)

Let's Talk About It

6. Imagine yourself as one of the people reclining on the grass. How do you feel as Jesus directs the disciples to bring food to you?
7. How do we honor people in our culture? Have you ever treated someone as an honored guest? What did it look like? How did it feel?
8. Have you ever been treated as an honored guest? What did that look like? How did you feel about that?

Jesus Says What?

What are the disciples thinking when they ask Jesus to send the people into town to buy food? It certainly would have been the practical thing to do, wouldn't you agree? After all, there were thousands of people lying on the grass (read Matthew 14:21), and only a few disciples (read Matthew 14:22; they all fit into one boat). But Jesus says no! (See "You Give Them Something To Eat," p. 26.)

Let's Talk About It

9. How do you suppose the disciples felt when they looked out over that vast hungry crowd, all looking to them? How do you suppose they felt when they heard Jesus say, "You give them something to eat"? How would you have felt? What would you have done?

Let's take that question a little further into our own time and place. Does your congregation sponsor a soup kitchen, food pantry, or something similar? Then

you're certainly aware that more and more people are depending on our help.

According to the national food-bank organization Feeding America, one in six Americans does not have regular access to enough food to sustain a healthy life—that's more than 50 million of our neighbors. Households with children report a much higher rate of food insecurity than households without—more than 20 percent of American households with children don't have regular access to enough food to stay healthy. (See "The Food Stamp Challenge," p. 22.)

And more and more of our neighbors in this situation are looking to us, Jesus' present-day disciples. And Jesus repeats what he said then: "You give them something to eat."

How do we feel about that? How do we act on that? Can we treat our neighbors as lovingly and respectfully as Jesus treated the crowds who gathered around him at the seashore?


And how are we going to feed all those hungry people with only five loaves and two little fishes?

That's what we'll talk about in the next session of "All Who Hunger, Gather Gladly."

Prayer

*Blessed are you, Holy God,
for you comfort those who mourn
and you feed those who are hungry.
Open wide your hand
and satisfy the needs of every living creature,
for we all wait upon your everlasting goodness.
This we ask through our Lord Jesus Christ,
who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit,
One God, for ever and ever.
Amen.*

Hymn

"You Satisfy the Hungry Heart" (ELW 484) 

Audrey Novak Riley serves the church as associate program director for ELCA World Hunger.

COMING IN SEPTEMBER

IN GOOD COMPANY: STORIES OF BIBLICAL WOMEN

BY RT. REV. DR. KAY WARD

SUBSCRIBE NOW AT
800/328-4648



LEADER GUIDE

HUNGRY HEARTS

by Audrey Novak Riley

Introduction

At the end of this three-session Bible study, we will act on Jesus' command both locally and globally. Ask participants and others in the congregation to do two things: bring groceries for a local food pantry, and bring monetary gifts for ELCA World Hunger (make checks out to Women of the ELCA and write ELCA World Hunger on the memo line). We will bless both these offerings at the closing prayer of the third study session.

Spread the word about the food drive and offering well ahead of time. You might also arrange for someone with a car or van to take the groceries to the food pantry.

A few days before each session begins, ask someone to serve as reader—someone different for each of the three study sessions, if possible. Let her know that her assignment is simple: to wait for your signal, read her text aloud to the group, and then keep silence.

Print out the Bible passages noted below, each on a separate page, making sure to end with Jesus' words, "give them something to eat." (The verse containing those words may go on, but we want to stop right there.) Give the printout to each reader well in advance and ask her to look it over so that she can proclaim it well.

Don't supply the whole group with printed copies of the texts. We want people to hear the living words spoken aloud, as they are able; for those who may have difficulty hearing, plan ahead and make some extra copies.

Session 1: Matthew 14:13–16

Session 2: Mark 6:32–37a

Session 3: Luke 9:10–13a

SESSION 1: Hungry Hearts

Satisfaction at the Table

This section is an icebreaker. Questions 1–3 are designed to help people start talking together about a happy memory of a satisfying meal. Some points to bring out include the pleasure of spending time with friends and the delight of the hosts in arranging a good meal for their friends. You might suggest other satisfying meals besides sit-down dinners with guests—pizza parties with the youth group, picnics with families, hotdogs at the ballpark with the grandkids, and so on.

People on the Edge

Discussion questions 4 and 5 have no right or wrong answers. They are simply to help people put themselves in the scene.

Some possible answers about the people's feelings might include bereft, sad, grieving, and also horrified, disgusted, helpless, oppressed, angry.

What Jesus Tells the People

This section brings in some historical information to back up the writer's theory about why Jesus had the people lie down on the grass.

Some readers may find the discussion of the Greek symposium interesting, and if so, you might tell them that the classic Greek symposium featured two parts: first, the meal, and second, the entertainment (which could range from lofty philosophical discussions to music to joke-telling contests to betting on whether a guest could fling a drop of wine into the center of the room).

A servant called the *symposiarch* decided how much wine each guest was to drink and how much water to mix into that wine—it was considered barbaric to drink unmixed wine. That servant was in charge of a large common vessel of wine in the center of the room, from which servants would fill pitchers to replenish the guests' cups. The symposiarch would mix more water into the wine if philosophical discussions were on the agenda and less water if the entertainment would feature joke-telling.

Discussion questions 6–8 have no right or wrong answers, but the hope is to suggest that the people were comforted by Jesus' treating them with respect.

Jesus Says What?

Discussion question 9 again has no right or wrong answer.

The discussion of hunger in our own communities may lead to lively conversation and that's fine. If the conversation gets off-track into questions of why people are hungry in the community, you might want to gently steer it back into our response to hunger, always remembering Christ's command to love our neighbor as ourselves. This might be a good time to discuss the article "The Food Stamp Challenge" on page 22.

ELCA World Hunger offers many informative and free downloadable activity toolkits on their website (www.elca.org/hunger/toolkits) that might be a good program for another time.

The ELCA World Hunger video series, free to order, download or view online at www.elca.org/hunger/videos, includes the story of a congregation in Seattle that welcomes people to feast at their table. You might show that video and talk some more about how that congregation's hospitality works, and how it affects all the people featured in the story.



PURPOSE STATEMENT OF WOMEN OF THE ELCA

As a community of women created in the image of God, called to discipleship in Jesus Christ, and empowered by the Holy Spirit, we commit ourselves to grow in faith, affirm our gifts, support one another in our callings, engage in ministry and action, and promote healing and wholeness in the church, the society, and the world.



BIBLE STUDY

DO WE HAVE ENOUGH?

by Audrey Novak Riley

Introduction

We all know the story: A crowd of people follows Jesus out to the countryside, and by the time evening rolls around they're all hungry. The disciples tell Jesus to send the people away so they can go get supper in town, and he answers, "You give them something to eat."

All four gospels give us this story. Three of them give us the command from Jesus in exactly the same words: "You give them something to eat" (Matthew 14:16; Mark 6:37; Luke 9:13). Is Jesus talking to *us*?

Hymn

"Take, Oh, Take Me As I Am," (*Evangelical Lutheran Worship* 814)

Prayer

Creator God,

You know our human limitations and weaknesses and you love us more than we can ever understand.

Help us to do your will as we are able, though that may be far more than we know now.

This we pray through your Son Jesus Christ, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, One God, for ever and ever. Amen.

You Can't Possibly Be Serious!

Imagine things are humming along

just fine, you're feeling pretty good about your own part in that, and then someone important comes to you with a request so totally out there that the only thing you can say is, "You can't possibly be serious!"

Can you think of a time when you were in that situation? (Every mother in the room is nodding her head.) I remember once when that happened to me.

Not long after I was married and moved to the suburb where we still live, I volunteered for a local women's civic-affairs group, looking

for a way to get involved with my new community and do some good. Most of the other women in the club were lifelong residents and longtime members who knew everyone in town, which is a real asset for people involved in civic affairs.

The women were friendly and made me feel welcome immediately, and before long I was busily involved in the group's doings, registering voters, handing out index cards for audience members' questions at a public meeting, and helping serve as timekeeper for a candidates' forum hosted by a high-school civics club in the next suburb. It was fun and I really enjoyed it.

But a certain issue kept coming up over and over again: I just didn't have enough time or energy to do everything they kept asking me to do—after all, I had a full-time job in the city as well as choir rehearsals and services in my old neighborhood, not to mention a husband who liked seeing me every once in a while—and I kept having to say

no, even when I would have liked to say yes. Then the head of the nominating committee asked me to serve as chair of the most active and publicly visible committee.

Say it with me: “You can’t *possibly* be serious!” (See “Just Ask Around,” p. 6.)

Let’s Talk About It

1. What do you think made the nominating committee head’s request so impossible for me? What limitations do you think a newcomer might have had that would have made it hard to be successful as chair?
2. When did you face a request like that? What was it like? Tell the person next to you about it.
3. How did you feel when someone made a request like that and you realized that they actually meant it? What words sprang to your mind, if not your lips?

The Apostles’ First Assignment

Now let’s turn to the gospel according to Mark, chapter 6, where we’ll hear about another astonishing request. As we listen, notice that that this gospel writer is using his favorite literary technique to tell the story—the sandwich. Mark uses this unique storytelling structure at least five times in this short gospel.

In the Markan sandwich, the writer tells the first part of a story (the first slice of bread), interrupts to tell a shorter but complete story (the filling), and then returns to finish the first story (the second slice of bread). The theological meat is in the filling, of course, and the story told in the slices of bread somehow reflects or interprets the story in the filling. And there’s almost always a word or phrase that appears near the beginning and again near the end of the sandwich (would it be too cute to call that the toothpick?).

We’re going to pay attention to the bread (and a little more) and skip over the filling this time.

The first slice of bread in our sandwich is this: Jesus

sends out the 12 apostles in pairs (6:7–13) to preach repentance, cast out demons and heal the sick, with only the barest of supplies.

The filling (6:14–29) is Herod’s suspicion that Jesus is actually John the Baptist returned from the dead, and then the story of how Herod had John killed.

The second slice (6:30) has the apostles returning from their mission journeys and telling Jesus everything they’ve said and done. And that leads into the story of what happened with the hungry crowds.

Now let’s hear the text. You might imagine yourself in the scene as one of the apostles who has just gone out on that important first mission and returned.

READ MARK 6:7–13, 30–37A.

Let’s Talk About It

4. What kinds of things did the apostles accomplish on the mission trip? How do you suppose they felt as they told Jesus about how they carried out his important assignment?
5. Now think about the crowds of excited people waiting on the shore to meet the apostles. What do you think the apostles are thinking and feeling as they realize what the crowds want?

Mark’s gospel suggests that there was a lot of excitement about the apostles’ return, saying that there were many people coming and going and “they had no leisure even to eat.” Is there anyone in your group who has served as a Young Adult in Global Mission or taken part in another mission opportunity, perhaps through Women of the ELCA? Ask her how people acted when she returned. Was there a lot of coming and going and fuss and excitement? Did everyone want to hear about what happened?

The apostles must have been deeply gratified, tired as they were, to realize that not only had they carried out Jesus’ assignment so well, but that their reputations as preachers and healers had spread far and wide. Thousands of people hurried on foot from all the

towns to see them. How exciting it must have been. We know that at least some of the apostles just couldn't help having their heads turned by their growing fame.

READ MARK 9:33–34.

Spotlight on the Apostles

As we recall from the first session of this Bible study, the gospel according to Matthew tells the story a little differently—Matthew's focus is on Jesus and the crowds. Mark puts the spotlight on the apostles, Jesus' closest followers. Why do you suppose this is?

Although Mark's gospel appears second in our Bibles, it was actually the first of the four gospels to be written down, probably no later than about the year 70, probably in Rome. A very old and widespread tradition has it that the writer was an associate of Peter, and that Peter's preaching is the source behind this gospel. That's important: Peter didn't sit down and dictate the gospel to Mark in order from beginning to end; he preached it over a period of many years, adapting his interpretation according to the needs of the moment or those of his hearers. After Peter's martyrdom in the year 64, this old tradition tells us, Mark wrote down everything he remembered of what Peter taught about Jesus.

So we can understand this telling of what happened as drawn from Peter's experience and observations. But how did he happen to tell the story the way he did? For that, let's think about the apostle as a person, with his own unique personality, his own unique limitations and gifts.

We know Peter was impulsive and emotional—and talkative. Throughout the gospels, we see him blurting out whatever comes into his head and heart: Scolding Jesus for predicting his own death (Mark 8:32); babbling about building tents for Jesus, Moses, and Elijah (9:5); denying Jesus three times and then going away to weep bitter tears (14:66–72). Have you ever known someone like that, someone who just didn't have a filter between their mind and their mouth? Well, that's

the person whose memory is the source behind the gospel story we're studying, and that person's feelings and reactions are tucked into the story. (See "Gifts of an Introvert," p. 22.)

Let's Talk About It

6. Everyone is different. Some people glow in the presence of a crowd. Others would rather die than be the center of attention, even admiring attention. And yet others are somewhere in the middle. Which one do you think Peter is? Which are you?
7. Likewise, some people experience something and then have to talk about it in order to process it. Others experience something and then have to think about it in order to process it, then talk about it. And others are in the middle. Which one do you think Peter is? Which are you? Do you think one way is better than another? What makes you think so?

Jesus Says What?

Let's turn back to the crowd gathered around Jesus and the apostles on the shore. By now it's getting late, and the apostles suggest to Jesus that he send them away so they can go buy their own suppers in town. But Jesus answers, "You give them something to eat."

Our NRSV translation gives us the apostles' response to this outrageous request as, "Are we to go and buy two-hundred denarii worth of bread and give it to them to eat?"

Two-hundred denarii is a *lot* of money. One denarius (the most common coin in the Roman world) was a day's pay for an unskilled laborer, and it would buy 10 days' worth of bread for that laborer—20 pounds. (Romans ate a lot of bread.) Two-hundred denarii would buy two tons of bread—clearly impossible.

The gospel doesn't give us the tone of voice behind the apostles' words, but we can imagine what it might have been. Incredulous. Astonished. Exasperated. (I imagine the tart tone of a certain blustery fisherman.)

In any case, we could paraphrase the apostles' response as: "You can't *possibly* be serious!"

Let's Talk About It

8. Clearly the apostles are sure they don't have *enough* to do what Jesus has asked them to do—not enough food, not enough money, not enough whatever. They don't see any possible way to feed so many people. Quite often, we are sure that we don't have enough *whatever* either—not enough money, not enough people, not enough experience, not enough *whatever*—to make a difference. What have you heard people say they don't have enough of?

More Than Enough

Notice what happens next. Jesus skips over the topic of what the apostles *don't* have and focuses on what they *do* have. Before they know it, their five loaves and two fish, not even enough for one family's picnic, becomes more than enough for everyone in the vast crowd. Scarcity becomes abundance.

In the first slice of bread on our gospel sandwich, Jesus sent the apostles out with nothing but a walking stick and a companion, and they were able to preach and heal and cast out demons. Here in this second slice, Jesus asked the apostles to show him what little they had, and with that, they fed the whole crowd. (See "The Gospel of Enough," p. 26.)

Let's Talk About It

9. What has Christ asked you, your women's group, or your congregation to do lately that you think you don't have enough *whatever* to do? What would happen if you focused on what you *do* have instead of what you *don't* have? How would it make you feel?

In our third and final session of "All Who Hunger, Gather Gladly," we'll look at the same event as told in the Gospel of Luke—and then we'll act on Christ's command to feed the hungry people.

Prayer

*Blessed are you, Holy Lord,
for you take us as we are
and love us into what we shall be;
you take the little we offer you
and transform it into abundance,
into strength, into value beyond rubies.
Transform our timidity
into eagerness to serve you in your hungry people.
This we ask through Jesus Christ our Lord.*

Hymn

"Take My Life, That I May Be" (ELW 583) 🌿

Audrey Novak Riley serves the church as associate program director, ELCA World Hunger.

NEW FROM Women of the ELCA 

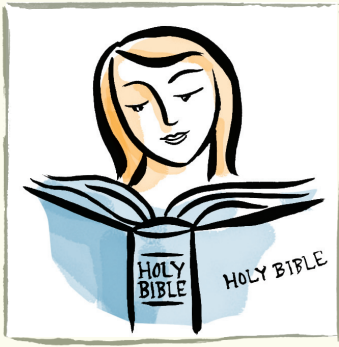
Silver Jewelry



Go to womenoftheelca.org and click on "shop now."

Let your commitment to mobilizing women to act boldly on their faith in Jesus Christ shine with this jewelry featuring the much-loved water, cross and lily from Women of the ELCA's logo. **Choose from lapel pins, earrings, charms, and pendants.**

Also available—25th anniversary silver ornament.



DO WE HAVE ENOUGH?

by Audrey Novak Riley

LEADER GUIDE

At the end of this three-session Bible study, we will act on Jesus' command both locally and globally. Ask participants and others in the congregation to do two things: bring groceries for a local food pantry, and bring monetary gifts for ELCA World Hunger (make checks out to Women of the ELCA and write ELCA World Hunger on the memo line). We will bless both these offerings at the closing prayer of the third study session.

You Can't Possibly Be Serious!

The story about the newcomer and the civic-affairs group is intended to be an icebreaker: Everyone has had the experience of being the newcomer.

The three discussion questions in this section have no right or wrong answers. They simply prepare us for the discussion of the apostles' experience of their own human limitations in the gospel.

If the discussion starts to drift off into talk about what the newcomer's experience might mean to your own women's group, you might suggest that that very useful conversation be saved for another time when it can be explored more thoroughly. Then draw the group back to the topic.

Discussion of Questions 1, 2 and 3 might point out the newcomer's time constraints and lack of local connections as limitations that would have made it hard to be successful. (If people are curious, you can tell them that I finally said yes, struggled through my one-year term as chair, and relinquished the office with relief.)

The Apostles' First Assignment

This section brings in some information about the structure of the Gospel of Mark. If participants are interested and have the time, you might let them know that the five sandwiches are Mark 3:20–35; 5:21–43; 6:7–30; 11:12–25; 13:5–23; 14:1–11. Some scholars recognize a few more in the text, but these five seem to be generally agreed on.

Question 4 asks participants to read the text again to name what the apostles accomplished; feel free to ask your reader to read the relevant portions of the text aloud again as many times as participants need.

Question 5 is intended to suggest that the apostles were feeling very pleased with their success and the people's response.

Spotlight on the Apostles

This section brings in a little information about the history of the Gospel of Mark and its possible source. The discussion of Peter's personality invites participants to

understand the human being behind the biblical figure.

The discussion questions about personality types should lead to the conclusion that neither is better than the other. Beyond that, there are no right or wrong answers. If people are interested in exploring the topic further, you might note that for future programs. The free online Women of the ELCA resource “Paths to Wholeness” explores how different personality types can be expressed in our spiritual lives.

Jesus Says What?

This section of our study gives a little historical information (the value of a denarius) and the writer’s imagination about the emotion implied in the words attributed to the apostles.

Discussion of Question 8 invites participants to ponder our own lacks and limitations by asking people to talk about what they’ve heard other people say. You might suggest that the discussion omit names or other identifying details.

More Than Enough

This section holds the point of this entire study. Make sure that participants see that Jesus doesn’t focus on what the apostles don’t have; he works with what they do have. What Jesus did for the apostles, Jesus can do for us.

The answer to the first part of Question 9 depends on your local situation. If the group seems to stall on this question, you might remind them that this Bible study focuses on Jesus’ command to “give them something to eat.” For the second part, participants should understand that our view of whatever makes that miraculous shift from scarcity to abundance when we focus on what we *do* have instead of what we don’t have.

Before the closing prayer and hymn, remind the group of the offering of groceries for a food pantry and gifts for ELCA World Hunger that will be received at the third and final session of “All Who Hunger, Gather Gladly.”

IN GOOD COMPANY: STORIES OF BIBLICAL WOMEN



Support your study with these helpful resources. Bible study companion pieces:

ELCAWO 1035	Leader Guide	\$7.95
ELCAWO 1036	Companion Bible	\$3.95
ELCAWO 1037	Bookmark (12 pack)	\$3.75

Order today by phone at 800-638-3522, ext. 2580, or online at www.elca.org/resources



BIBLE STUDY

ALL ATE AND WERE FILLED

by Audrey Novak Riley

Hymn

“Strengthen for Service, Lord” (*ELW* 497)

Prayer

*Creator God,
when you ask us to do your will
you give us everything we need.
Grant that we may leave our fear behind
and trust your Son when he asks us
to go beyond what we see as our limits.
This we ask through your Son, our Lord Jesus Christ,
who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit,
One God, forever and forever.*

Confidence

Has someone ever had more confidence in you than you had in yourself? So much confidence that they asked you—no, they *expected* you—to do something that you weren’t even sure was possible for you? That happened to me recently.

I used to sing with the choir at a church in the city for years. In comparison with my fellow altos, I thought my musical gifts and skills were adequate but not much more

than that, and that was fine with me. *Someone* has to be average, after all, and I was just happy to contribute what I could.

Then my husband and I started attending a church closer to home, and I volunteered with that choir. My new choir director seemed to have an entirely different opinion of my skills than I did. He told me he thought I was a very fine musician, of all things. I thought he was just being nice, but he kept acting as if

he meant it. Sometimes he’d ask me to sing with the sopranos, even at the last minute. (Sight-reading Bach, in German, in public, at the tippy-top of my vocal range. I can’t believe I actually did it!)

Then he invited me to sing in the chorus for the annual concert series, alongside *real, trained, professional* musicians, for a *paying* audience! Clearly he wouldn’t ask if he didn’t think I could do it—but where in the world did he get that idea? What could I possibly say?

Let’s Talk About It

1. What do you think made the choir director’s invitation so surprising to me?
2. When did someone expect more of you than you thought you were capable of? What was it like? Tell the person next to you about it.
3. How did it feel to know that someone had that much confidence in you? Did you do anything differently because of their faith in you?

Jesus' Confidence

Now let's turn to the gospel according to Luke chapter 9, where we'll hear about Jesus' confidence in his disciples—and why he was so confident.

READ LUKE 9:10–13A.

This sounds almost exactly like the story in Mark's gospel that we looked at in Session 2 of this study, doesn't it? There's a reason for that. Luke tells us in the beginning of this gospel that he drew on many sources to tell the story in an orderly fashion. Scholars have determined that the Gospel of Mark is one of the main sources.

A few verses before this, in Luke 9:1–6, Jesus had sent the disciples out to proclaim the good news and heal the sick. He told them not to bring any supplies with them, not even a change of clothes. Look at Luke 9:6. They not only proclaimed the good news through the villages, they cured diseases “everywhere.”

Let's Talk About It

4. Jesus gave the disciples a big assignment when he sent them out to the villages in Luke 9:2. Do you think they were confident that they could do it? Why or why not? Do you think Jesus was confident that they could? Why or why not?
5. In Luke 9:13, Jesus clearly expects the disciples to be able to give the crowd something to eat. What do you think gave him that idea?

“No, Not A Thing.”

Much later in Luke's gospel (22:35), Jesus asks the disciples, “When I sent you out without a purse, bag, or sandals, did you lack anything?”

That's an interesting question, and the answer is even more interesting. The disciples could have answered him, “Well, I didn't have any money,” or “Clean socks would have been nice,” but they didn't say anything like that. They said, “No, not a thing.”

How could that be? How could they lack nothing when they went out with nothing? How could they succeed as missionaries—medical missionaries, at that—without any equipment? Take a look at Luke 9:2. Jesus gave the disciples the power to do what they needed to do in order to carry out their mission. Jesus equipped them. (See “The Gospel of Enough,” p. 26.)

Apostle Paul, who thought deeply about these things, wrote a letter from prison to the believers in Philippi. In it, he wrote about how he kept on through everything he endured on his own mission trips: “I can do all things through [Christ Jesus] who strengthens me” (Philippians 4:13). The important part of that sentence isn't the first part but the second: “Jesus . . . strengthens me.”

Jesus strengthened his disciples for their mission trip (Luke 9:2). He equipped them with what they needed in order to carry out the assignment he gave them. The gospel names not only the power to cure diseases, but “power and authority over all demons.”

The gospel writer understood demons differently than we do; we certainly wouldn't say that a child with epilepsy had a demon. But I think if the gospel writer includes in that category of demons whatever causes us to lie to ourselves and whatever causes us to believe those lies—well, I think we could go along with that. Jesus strengthened the disciples and gave them the power to cast out—even from themselves—the demons that whisper, “Don't be silly, you can't do that. Who do you think you are?” or “Don't ask for things that way. What will people think?”

What Jesus did for his disciples then, he continues to do for us now. If you have an *ELW* hymnal handy, take a look at page 237, the Affirmation of Baptism. The presiding minister asks, “Do you intend . . . to proclaim the good news . . . [and] serve all people, following the example of Jesus?” That sounds pretty much like the mission Jesus sent the disciples out on, doesn't it? The baptismal ritual has us all answer, “I do, and I ask God

to help and guide me.” *There*. That’s the key. With God’s help and guidance—with Jesus strengthening us—we can carry out the mission we’ve been given. Who do we think we are? We think we’re disciples of Jesus Christ, who strengthens us and equips us for mission. What will people think? They might think we’re pretty bold, and that’s what happens when Jesus not only gives us an assignment but also gives us everything we need—resources, wisdom, generosity and friends to help us along the way—to carry out that assignment. Jesus has confidence that we can carry out his mission because he has equipped us for that mission.

Let’s Talk About It

6. When the disciples went out on their mission trip, they didn’t bring anything with them. How do you think they arranged for such basics as food and lodging?
7. If you believed that Jesus was strengthening you and equipping you for mission, would you do anything differently than you do now? What? How would you do it differently?

Jesus Reminds Us When We Forget

When the disciples ask Jesus to send the crowds away so they can buy their own suppers and Jesus answers with that astonishing request, “You give them something to eat,” the disciples are caught flat-footed. They’ve clearly forgotten what happened on their successful mission trip: Jesus had equipped them to carry out his assignment. If Jesus had made it possible for the disciples to do something that looked impossible then, wouldn’t he do the same thing again?

In all three versions of the story we’ve looked at in this study, we see that Jesus doesn’t spend any time on the disciples’ fears or protests or smart-aleck remarks about tons of bread. He simply says, “Show me what you have.” He doesn’t let them dwell on what they *don’t* have; he shifts the focus to what they *do* have.

What do they have? To our eyes, not much. But

with Jesus, it’s more than enough, because he has already equipped them with everything they need. (See “Seven Tips for Service,” p. 12.)

Let’s Talk About It

8. If you were to follow Jesus’ example and focus on what you do have instead of what you don’t have, would you do anything differently? How? What would you do differently?
9. If Jesus were to say to you today, “You give them something to eat,” what would you say? What would you do?

Prayer

Our closing prayer concludes with our offering of groceries for a local food pantry and our offering of monetary gifts for our church’s ministry with those who are hungry, ELCA World Hunger.

This ritual calls for one leader and two readers, as well as two assistants to gather the offerings. Envelopes may be gathered in a basket; groceries may be placed together in grocery bags or baskets. Please feel free to improvise or elaborate on this basic outline. Musicians and decorators are invited to add their services, as well.

Note to the leader: You might remind participants that they can give to ELCA World Hunger through Women of the ELCA. Simply make out the check to Women of the ELCA and write “ELCA World Hunger” on the memo line.

Leader: Let us pray.

Loving and ever-giving God, you give us all we need to carry out your will. Grant us wisdom to turn away from our own fears and act joyfully when your Son asks us to give the people something to eat. This we ask through your son Jesus Christ, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

Reader 1: A reading from the Gospel of John, the 21st chapter.

Jesus said to Simon Peter, “Simon son of John, do you

love me more than these?” He said to him, “Yes, Lord; you know that I love you.” Jesus said to him, “Feed my lambs.” A second time he said to him, “Simon son of John, do you love me?” He said to him, “Yes, Lord; you know that I love you.” Jesus said to him, “Tend my sheep.” He said to him the third time, “Simon son of John, do you love me?” Peter felt hurt because he said to him the third time, “Do you love me?” And he said to him, “Lord, you know everything; you know that I love you.” Jesus said to him, “Feed my sheep.”

Leader: When Jesus speaks to Peter, he is speaking to all his disciples, even to us, his present-day followers. When Jesus tells us, through Peter, to feed his sheep, we know that he has supplied us with everything we need to carry out his mission.

Reader 1: Jesus asks, “Do you love me?”

All: Yes, Lord, you know that we love you.

Reader 2: Jesus says, “Feed my lambs.”

All: I will, with God’s help and guidance.

Reader 1: Jesus asks, “Do you love me?”

All: Yes, Lord, you know that we love you.

Reader 2: Jesus says, “Tend my sheep.”

All: I will, with God’s help and guidance.

Reader 1: Jesus asks, “Do you love me?”

All: Yes, Lord, you know that we love you.

Reader 2: Jesus says, “Feed my sheep.”

All: I will, with God’s help and guidance.

Reader 1: Jesus asks, “Do you lack anything?”

All: No, not a thing. We are equipped for mission.

Reader 2: Jesus says, “You give them something to eat.”

All: We will, with God’s help and guidance.

Reader 1: Jesus asks, “Do you lack anything?”

All: No, not a thing. We have been equipped for mission.

Reader 2: Jesus says, “You give them something to eat.”

All: We will, with God’s help and guidance.

Reader 1: Jesus asks, “Do you lack anything?”

All: No, not a thing. We have been equipped for mission.

Reader 2: Jesus says, “You give them something to eat.”

All: We will, with God’s help and guidance.

Leader: Jesus has equipped us for mission, and so we act on his command with confidence and joy.

Assistants may help gather the offering of groceries and monetary gifts into a central place visible to all. As the offering is received, the leader may describe the local food pantry that will receive the groceries, and another person may describe the ministry of ELCA World Hunger, which works to alleviate hunger and poverty in more than 50 countries around the world, including the United States.

Leader: Let us bless the Lord.

All: Thanks be to God!

Hymn

“All Who Hunger, Gather Gladly” (ELW 461) 🌿

Audrey Novak Riley serves the church as associate program director, ELCA World Hunger.



**Follow Gather
on Facebook.**

www.facebook.com/gathermagazine



LEADER GUIDE

ALL ATE AND WERE FILLED

by Audrey Novak Riley

Confidence

This section is simply intended to help each participant consider the idea of someone having confidence (you might call it faith) in her.

There are no right or wrong answers to the first three discussion questions, but the leader might ensure that certain points arise in the discussion:

The choir director was confident in my abilities because of the other times he had asked me to stretch past what I thought were my abilities. He had ascertained that I was equipped with everything I needed to carry out the assignment, even if I didn't realize it. (If people are curious, the leader can tell them that I said yes, and the concert was wonderful.)

Jesus' Confidence

This short section focuses on the reason why Jesus was confident that the disciples could carry out his request to feed the hungry crowd. He had already seen how they carried out a previous assignment, and he knew that he had already equipped them with everything they needed.

Question 4 is intended to bring out the point that even if the disciples weren't confident in their own abilities, Jesus was, because he knew that he had equipped them with everything they needed.

Question 5 is meant to lead to the conclusion that

Jesus was confident that the disciples could carry out this new assignment because he knew that, again, he had equipped them with everything they needed, whether they knew it or not.

"No, Not A Thing."

This longer section contains the point to this entire Bible study: Jesus strengthens us. We can confidently answer, "I will, with God's help and guidance," because that help and guidance will always be there.

The short discussion of the power to cast out demons is this writer's own interpretation of what that can mean for us today. We women are sometimes reluctant to act even on what we know is right because we have false ideas about ourselves. The truth—and Jesus is the Truth—will set us free.

There are no right or wrong answers to the discussion questions, but Question 6 is intended to suggest that the disciples were equipped to ask people to help support their mission by supplying food, lodging, money, and so on. It's a fact that people actually like to help; they like to be asked and they will often respond more generously than we expect. That might have happened with the hungry crowd, as well: The disciples might have asked the people to give what they could to help their neighbors, and the people might have responded more generously than anyone expected.

Jesus Reminds Us When We Forget

This section reminds us that we don't need to worry; Jesus will supply what we need to carry out the assignments he gives us.

There are no right or wrong answers to the last two discussion questions. You might suggest that participants take these questions home and ponder them privately in prayer as well.

Prayer

The suggested ritual is only a basic outline; please feel free to elaborate or improvise on it with joyful music, decoration, dance—whatever will honor the generosity of the participants.

After all, we're responding together to Jesus' call to feed the hungry, and that's worth celebrating!

ABOUT ELCA WORLD HUNGER

Our church is a leader in the movement to end hunger and poverty in the world, and ELCA World Hunger is how we do it. Thanks to the generous support of ELCA members through-

out the church, ELCA World Hunger empowers families and communities around the world to lift themselves out of poverty and into self-sufficiency—for good.

Please visit www.ELCA.org/hunger for much more about our church's ministry to end

hunger and poverty, for resources you can use in your own congregation, and for ways you can be involved as a volunteer hunger leader.

Your generosity in service, prayer, and giving is what makes ELCA World Hunger as effective as it is. Thank you.

The peace of Christ be with you always.

We are a church that believes God is calling us into the world – together. Working with Lutheran churches in the U.S. and around the world, ELCA World Hunger is uniquely positioned to reach communities in need with innovative solutions that get at the root causes of hunger. Thank you for your prayers, your partnership and your gifts.

Give now.

ELCA World Hunger • P.O. Box 71764 • Chicago, IL 60694-1764
www.ELCA.org/hunger

Photo: Sean Hawkey/CWS/CIEETS



ELCA World Hunger
Evangelical Lutheran Church in America
God's work. Our hands.