Lenten Series Week 3

John 6:1-15 [The Crowd, the Bread and Jesus]  “Perceiving then that they were about to come and take him by force to make him king, Jesus withdrew again to the mountain by himself.”

Introduction:
Over the last two weeks, we have heard Jesus speak about eternal life and living water. In both conversations, Jesus speaks on a level that the people do not initially understand, using concrete, earthly things to teach about Spiritual truth. As you make your way through today’s study, consider what Jesus might be trying to show on a spiritual level through the concrete miracle in the text.

Overview:

As you approach the Sea of Galilee from the west, you first have to pass under the shadow of Mt. Arbel, pictured above. The mountain commands a spectacular view of the sea and is a likely setting for our text from John 6.

John tells us that the miraculous feeding of the crowd took place during Passover, the time when Israel shared a meal to remember and re-enact God’s faithfulness in bringing them out of bondage and slavery in Egypt. Jesus has been preaching, teaching and healing, and once again the crowds have gathered around him, fascinated to see what he will do next.

Prayer:
Lord, open our ears to hear your voice and our hearts to receive your word. Speak to us by the power of your Spirit and make us more like Christ. Amen.

Biblical Text:
John 6:1-15
Discussion:
Begin with an imaginative exercise (Leader should read the following slowly, pausing when necessary, allowing people time to immerse themselves in the text). Take a moment to imagine the scene. Close your eyes and picture yourself as one of the disciples wondering where you will get enough bread. Imagine the sounds and smells of the gathered crowds. Picture the sun reflecting on the sea below you and the wind rustling in the grass. What goes through your mind as you sit there with Jesus? How do you react when Jesus asks you to feed those gathered? Picture the scene play out in your mind as Jesus blesses the few gifts that have been brought and then calls you to pass the food out to those gathered. What do you begin to think or feel as each time you go back to Jesus for a refill, he has more to give? What do you experience when you finally collect all of the leftovers and realize that there are twelve full baskets? (After the exercise, take a moment to discuss your impressions with one another)

1. Share about a time when God asked you to do something that seemed out of reach. What happened? How did God act in that situation?
2. John says that Jesus asks the disciples where to buy bread in order to test them (v. 5-6). What is Jesus doing here? What does he want his disciples to learn?
3. What do you make of the disciples’ reactions? How might you have reacted?
4. Where have you seen God’s provision in your life? How have these experiences shaped your relationship with God?
5. John ends the story in v. 15 with Jesus withdrawing because the people are about to make him king by force. Why do you think the people want this and why does Jesus withdraw?
6. What do we learn about God from this passage? What do we learn about ourselves?
7. In John 6:26-27, Jesus critiques the people for following him because he gave them bread instead of believing him to be the Messiah, and he encourages them to work for the food that endures to eternal life. Later in the chapter, as the people continue to ask him for food or for other signs and wonders, he refers to himself as the bread of life and says that all to come to him will not hunger. At the end of the chapter, Jesus tells those gathered that they must “eat the flesh of the son of man and drink his blood.” After this, many leave Jesus because of this difficult teaching (v. 66). What were the people missing? How did the people misunderstand the miracle and why do you think this is? What were the people hoping for?
8. What would you say was the point of the miracle? What was Jesus trying to teach those gathered, and what might He be wanting us to learn?

Application:
We serve a God who provides. As the Passover reminded the people of Israel, God provided a way out of slavery and death. Here, Jesus demonstrated care for the physical needs of those gathered. Yet this passage also points to our deeper need for Jesus. He is the bread of life. He does not just provide what we need: He is what we need. While bread is good and necessary, it does not actually solve our deepest problems. It can’t give us eternal life. It cannot deal with our bondage to sin and death. Only Jesus can do that. And yet all too often, like those gathered around Jesus on the mountain, we just want the bread. We want our immediate needs met, and Jesus becomes a means to an end. As you go throughout the week, be mindful of the ways you are tempted to use Jesus as a means to an end instead of seeing Him as the goal of your journey.

Pray:
Lord God Almighty, thank you for your provision. Thank you for every good gift that we have ever received that comes from you. And thank you most of all for Jesus Christ, through whom we have received redemption and the forgiveness of sins. Help us to trust you in all we do, and may our lives reflect your grace, goodness, and mercy. Through Christ our Lord we pray. Amen.