

# Self-Study and the Feeding of Four Thousand

By Lester Edwin J. Ruiz, Director of Accreditation and Global Engagement, ATS



Sadao Watanabe, *Disciples with Fish*, 1966

## Reflections

*A self-study includes acts of justice and mercy rooted in compassion.*

Jesus says at the very beginning of the story, “I have compassion for these people...”

*A self-study includes attending to one’s location and careful observation.*

“They have already been with me three days,” Jesus says, “and have nothing to eat.”

*A self-study includes knowing the consequences of one’s context.*

“If I send them home hungry, they will collapse on the way, because some of them have come a long distance.”

*A self-study includes asking the right, purposeful, data-informed and ecologically-oriented questions about one’s situation.*

“But where in this remote place can anyone get enough bread to feed them?” The disciples must have surveyed the area where they were.

*A self-study includes engaging the specific questions.*

“How many loaves do you have?”

*A self-study includes knowing what you have.*

The disciples answered: “Seven.” The disciples must have asked the people if they had any food with them—otherwise, how could they have answered Jesus so specifically? They did their research. And they must also have inventoried their resources.

*A self-study includes dialogue, collaboration, and sharing the work around specific needs.*

Jesus asked the people to sit down. And with the disciples—together—they fed the hungry people.

*A self-study includes public service.*

*Leitourgia*—the work of the people.

*A self-study includes not a banquet, but a meal that satisfied.*

Not fresh, sushi-grade fish...but dried, salty fish...not freshly baked bread; but probably dry, three-day-old barley bread—it had to be if they were on the road for three days.

*A self-study is not about scarcity but about abundance.*

“Seven baskets full of bread...” God’s common grace.

*A self-study includes also making time for daily work and rest.*

“Go back to your daily lives...” After the meal, Jesus sent the people away. “He went away on a boat...”

*A self-study includes looking for signs.*

And then, the Pharisees... asking for a sign, and Jesus asking, “Why does this generation ask for a sign?” Looking for signs. But what kind of signs?

*A self-study is a public act.*

Feeding the four thousand.

The sign of a good self-study? People are fed.  
Amen.

## Scripture reading: Mark 8: 1–13, New International Version

8 During those days another large crowd gathered. Since they had nothing to eat, Jesus called his disciples to him and said, <sup>2</sup> “I have compassion for these people; they have already been with me three days and have nothing to eat. <sup>3</sup> If I send them home hungry, they will collapse on the way, because some of them have come a long distance.”

<sup>4</sup> His disciples answered, “But where in this remote place can anyone get enough bread to feed them?”

<sup>5</sup> “How many loaves do you have?” Jesus asked.

“Seven,” they replied.

<sup>6</sup> He told the crowd to sit down on the ground. When he had taken the seven loaves and given thanks, he broke them and gave them to his disciples to distribute to the people, and they did so.<sup>7</sup> They had a few small fish as well; he gave thanks for them also and told the disciples to distribute them.

<sup>8</sup> The people ate and were satisfied. Afterward the disciples picked up seven basketfuls of broken pieces that were left over.<sup>9</sup> About four thousand were present. After he had sent them away,<sup>10</sup> he got into the boat with his disciples and went to the region of Dalmanutha.

<sup>11</sup> The Pharisees came and began to question Jesus. To test him, they asked him for a sign from heaven.<sup>12</sup> He sighed deeply and said, “Why does this generation ask for a sign? Truly I tell you, no sign will be given to it.”<sup>13</sup> Then he left them, got back into the boat and crossed to the other side.