

# The Banquet Table

## an interpretive reading for youth

Note: This reading can be done for the congregation in worship or simply among the youth as an interpretive exercise. It can be done with or without pantomime, but it would be more effective with pantomime (or dance, if your youth tend toward that kind of interpretation). If you choose to use pantomime, you can decide to use as many players as you like, or as many as you have. You could ask your players to dress up according to the roles they play, or you could ask them all to wear the same color. They might enjoy setting up a banquet table and festooning it with place settings, confetti, and flowers. Brainstorm with them and get them to come up with interpretive actions for each reading. Some of them could dress in fancy clothing, and some in rags. Or the same group could play both the original guests and the substitute guests. Encourage them to be creative.

FIRST READER: A certain Man was preparing a great feast.

SECOND READER: He invited the many to come and eat,  
to come and eat and drink His cup to be...

THIRD READER: At the banquet table of Love,  
At the feast of Forgiveness  
Where Mercy serves and Truth lives  
and Hope is found.  
At the meal of Righteousness,  
Grace abounds.

FIRST READER: The servants called the many to come and eat.

SECOND READER: Excuses were made.

FOURTH READER: One had a new field.

FIFTH READER: One had a new wife.

SIXTH READER: All too busy to come and be His guests...

THIRD READER: At the banquet table of Love,  
At the feast of Forgiveness  
Where Mercy serves and Truth lives  
and Hope is found.  
At the meal of Righteousness,  
Grace abounds.

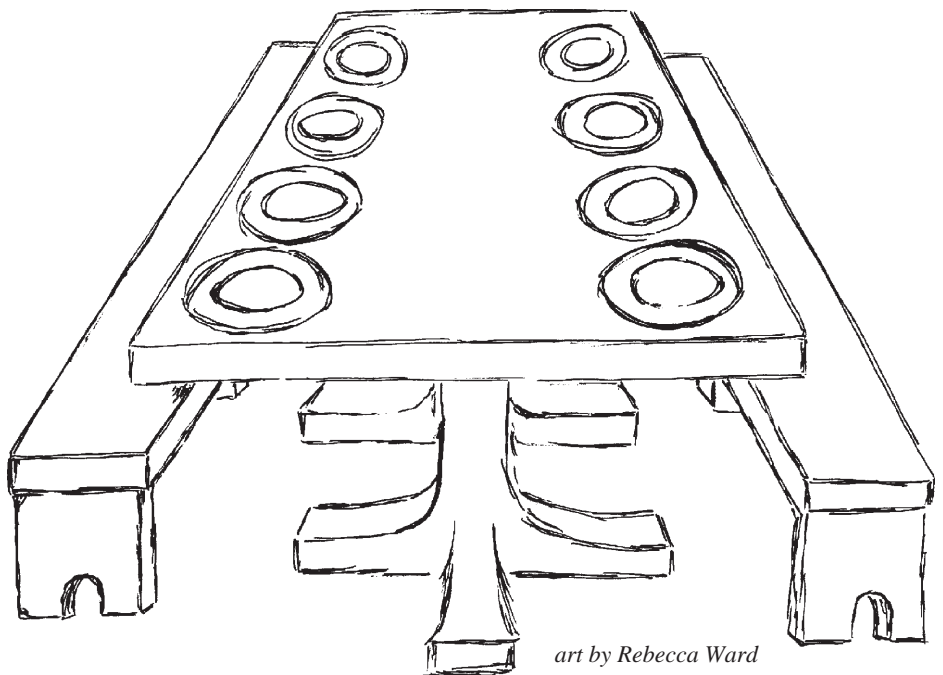
FIRST READER: The Master said,  
"Since they did not come when I called,  
SECOND READER: Go and gather  
the poor and lame,  
the broken and shamed

FOURTH READER: to come and eat  
and they will be guests..."

THIRD READER: At the banquet table of Love,  
At the feast of Forgiveness  
Where Mercy serves and Truth lives  
and Hope is found.  
At the meal of Righteousness,  
Grace abounds.

ALL READERS: Yes, at the meal of Righteousness,  
Grace abounds.

*This reading was adapted from a poem by Michele Perry.*



*art by Rebecca Ward*

# The Table of the Lord

## a drama

by John Stewart Ballenger

a play for four persons (men and women) at the front of the sanctuary, one person (man or woman) at the back of the sanctuary, a number (you pick, but minimum of four) of persons (men and women, boys and girls) throughout the sanctuary and one woman in the congregation.

*The front of the church should be set as normal. If your pastor uses a pulpit, have it in place. If, however, you don't have an altar table set out normally, place one front and center. It should have a plywood sheet over it covered with a tablecloth so that you can't tell that it's the altar table just by looking at it. The table should be set for dinner, with plates, glasses, napkins, silver and serving dishes. Put the canned goods and nonperishable food items you have been collecting for World Food Day in baskets and place the baskets around the front of the sanctuary. You need at least eight full baskets, preferably more. If you have more, put the rest behind the first pews next to the center aisle.*

*When voices come from the congregation, they should be scattered throughout the sanctuary; they should be diverse in age and gender, and they should follow each other quickly so that the sound jumps around the sanctuary. When voices come from the congregation, feel free to add more "like" lines. Have several people saying one or more of the lines together, or individually. See what it sounds like. See what sounds best.*

*voices from the congregation:*

Pass the potatoes please.

There are more rolls in the kitchen, should I go get them?

Can I have another piece of chicken?

Don't forget to save room for dessert.

Oh, I couldn't possibly.

I'm so full I'm not going to be able to eat for a week.

During these lines, four people who don't have lines, who aren't speaking, come forward from the congregation. One goes to the front left (Downstage Right—DSR), one to the front right (Downstage Left—DSL), one to front center (Downstage Center—DSC), and one to the pulpit (Upstage Center—USC).

*As they say the next lines, the four (DSR, L, C and USC) take four of the baskets of food from the front and place them next to each other in the center aisle. Then they go back to their places.*

DSC: Abundance is a foreign concept in most of the world.



art by Sharon Rollins

DSL: Abundance is even a foreign concept in much of America.

DSR: But most of us take abundance for granted.

USC: I have come that you might have life and life more abundant.

Next lines from the congregation:

*(matter of factly)* Of course you have.

During the next lines (still from the congregation), DSR, L, C and USC add the last four baskets to the heap in the center aisle.

*(smugly)* You have come that my life might be more abundant.

*(smugly)* You have come to give me more abundance.

DSL: The gospel of success is so attractive, isn't it?

DSR: So seductive.

DSL, R, C and USC: *(in unison)* So nice *(draw out the hissing sound at the end of "nice.")*

*DSL, R, C and USC go back to their places.*

DSC: Abundance taken for granted is translated into perversions—distortions. And the fact of the matter is, that we as humans, are ill-equipped to handle abundance appropriately.

DSL: Rather a blunt statement there, eh?

DSR: Wouldn't it be nice if it weren't true?

USC: Could you explain junk food to someone without food?

next lines from the congregation:

Ah. Well, it's um, food that has no nutritional value, but it uh, tastes good.

It's um, something to do—something to eat—while you're doing something else.

You know like busy work is work you do just to be working?

Junk food is the kind of food you eat just to be eating.

USC: How about fast food?

next lines from the congregation:

It's when you want to eat in a hurry.

Yeah, when you've only got a few minutes to eat, or no time to prepare.

Yes, well, fast food is food subordinate to convenience.

DSR: (*incredulously*) You eat just to eat while you're doing something else?

DSL: (*incredulously*) food is less important than convenience?

DSC: Insufferable arrogance incarnate in advertising.

from the congregation:

Not going anywhere for a while? have a Snickers.

Thirsty? have a Sprite.

Have it your way, everyday.

Have a Coke and a smile.

Add some other commercials if you want. Substitute local ones—better ones. They should all have to do with food or drink and should focus on the immediate gratification of want.

DSR: Insufferable arrogance incarnate in those who mock our needs with the over-arching importance of the immediate gratification of their wants.

DSL: Mock without thinking. It's not deliberate.

DSC: It's unconsciously cruel.

USC: Abundance taken for granted is translated into perversions—distortions.

DSC: It becomes a competition.

from the congregation:

(*triumphantly*) The gospel of me.

(*triumphantly*) The gospel of mine.

DSC: You ever get mad at a brother or sister or guest for having gotten the last one?

USC: Whatever the one was.

from the congregation:

I'm sorry, that was the last one, dear.

No more.

They're all gone.

That was the last of it.

Nope, that finished it all off.

We'll get some more next time we go to the store.

DSR: Delayed gratification was rarely, if ever, a consolation to me when I was a kid.

DSL: Consequently, delayed gratification is rarely, if ever, a consolation to me as an adult.

from the congregation:

(*stridently*) I want it NOW.

DSR: You ever get mad at a brother or sister or guest for having taken more than you did? And then had it occur to you as you looked across the table at how much they got, that who you're really mad at is yourself, for not having taken more when you had the chance. And it just doesn't work to ask for more before you've eaten what you already got, even though that's what you really want to do.

from the congregation:

(*stridently*) I want it all NOW.

DSL: Or you're with your family at the cafeteria, and your parents look at all you've put on your tray to begin with and look at all that's still left on your tray at the end and say, "eyes bigger than your tummy, eh?"

from the congregation:

(*defensively*) well, I wanted it THEN.

DSC: And how many times have you left the table feeling rather bloated: "Oh, I ate too much." And did you ever notice that if you eat too many pancakes and waffles for breakfast, the same smell you celebrated upon waking up and walking into the kitchen is positively sickening?

from the congregation:

(*defensively*) But I wanted it all THEN.

DSC: What we want now, we will justify later.

DSL and R: (*in unison*) What we want, we will justify.



art by Sharon Rollins

USC: Did you ever feel the need to grab as much as you could, for fear of not getting as much as you wanted? You've noticed, haven't you, that for us it's always about what we want, not what we need. What we need is a given—taken for granted.

DSC: Insufferable arrogance incarnate in those who mock our needs with the over-arching importance of the immediate gratification of their wants.

DSL: Mock without thinking.

DSR: Unconsciously cruel.

DSC: Then we get spiritual.

USC: (with excitement) At the table of the Lord, there is room for all!

from the congregation:

Amen!

Reach the unreached!

Pull up a chair to the table of the Lord!

USC: (*with excitement*) At the table of the Lord, there is bread and wine for all!

from the congregation:

Preach it!

Evangelize the masses!

Pull up another chair to the table of the Lord!

*a voice from the back of the sanctuary:*

(*strongly*) I have come that you might have life and life more abundant.

DSC: Big deal—it's symbolic.

from the congregation:

(*righteously*) He has come that we might teach them of the abundant joy of the Christian life.

(*piously*) He has come that we might make their spiritual lives more abundant. (*sympy*) It's all anyone really needs.

DSL: Everyone can have a symbol. As much of it as they want.

DSR: It doesn't cost me anything.

DSC: We've made of the Lord's supper, fast food—junk food—something incomprehensible to those without food.

from the congregation:

Do you who are starving believe that you have sinned?

Do you who have buried your children who all died of malnutrition believe that Jesus will save you?

Do you for whom health care is not a part of your world accept Jesus as your Lord and Savior?

*voice from the back:*

(*sadly*) Insufferable arrogance. The cruel mockery of those who deny our needs with the over-arching importance of the immediate gratification of their wants.

DSC: Abundance taken for granted is translated into perversions—distortions.

DSR: Who cares if people are oppressed—as long as they know Jesus.

DSL: Who cares if someone's starving—as long as they can have the Lord's supper.

from the congregation:

Mock without thinking

It's positively sickening

*several voices from the congregation in unison:*

Lord, when was it that we saw you hungry, or thirsty, and did not take care of you?

voice from the back:

Truly I tell you, just as you did not do it to one of the least of these, you did not do it to me.

from the congregation:

You did not do it to me.

You did not do it to me.

*voice from the back:*

Whoever, therefore, eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner will be answerable for the body and blood of the Lord. Examine yourselves, and only then eat of the bread and drink of the cup. (*1 Corinthians 11: 27-28*)

USC: The multitudes hunger. Do we send them away?

from the congregation:

“Aw, let them fend for themselves.”

“We're not prepared to feed this many.”

“Have they been baptized?”

*voice from the back:*

Jesus said, “All I have is my blood. All I have is my body.”

DSR: And he looked to heaven, blessed and bled—blessed and was broken,

voice from the back:

“This is my body. This is my blood.”

from the congregation:

And all ate and were filled.

And all eat and are filled.

DSL: Jesus bled—Jesus was broken, and by the grace of God, there is enough—enough for all.

DSR, C, L and USC redistribute the baskets of food around the front of the sanctuary and add to the original eight any that were stashed behind the front pew.

*next three lines said as a round from the congregation:*

With baskets left over

With baskets left over

With baskets left over

USC: Baskets of grace. Baskets of love. Baskets of food.

Baskets of canned goods and nonperishable food items.

Baskets of compassion incarnate in what people need. Jesus

made manifest in specific, particular needs met.

*voice from the back:*

I have come that you might have life more abundant—

DSC: A life of health,

DSR: A life of dignity,

DSL: A life of unsurpassed worth.

USC: You know, most people serve the best first. Then if that runs out, you get whatever's in the fridge: the leftovers from previous meals, scraps. But here the more that is served, the better it all gets.

*voice from the back:*

I have my body. I have my blood. And I have come that you might have life more and more and more abundant.

DSL: What's it like to bleed for life that may one day be? A woman who has not said anything to this point stands up in the congregation:

It is to suffer for a dream that may one day be, but it is to suffer without guarantee. It is to be reminded that tomorrow is always prepared today, and that no one is born without having caused pain, without rending and tearing. No one is born without a blood debt owed to others. (*she sits down*)

DSR: What's it like to be broken for people you don't even know?

*woman, sitting:*

It is a profound affirmation of faith and hope and love.

all the voices in the congregation in unison:

And the greatest of these is love.

*DSL and DSR pick up the plywood: tablecloth, place settings and all. They carry it off, leaving the altar table bare. USC places on the altar table a chalice and pitcher. DSC places a loaf of bread on a plate next to the chalice. In the silence, USC pours juice from the pitcher into the cup. In the silence, DSC lifts the loaf and tears it in two. USC and DSC then leave.*

*If this is an option, have your choir or an ensemble sing a hymn or choir piece from the back of the sanctuary. There should be nothing visual for the congregation to focus on except the communion table. The following are a few suggestions:*

- "In Remembrance," Ragan Courtney, Buryl Red
- "I Come with Joy," Brian Wren
- "For the Bread Which You Have Broken," Louis F. Benson, V. Earle

*Copes*

- "Here's to the Day," Milton Brasher-Cunningham, Billy Crockett

*Whatever piece you choose, it cannot be a selection that is only celebratory. It must move from what Christ offers us, at the table, to our responsibility as those who partake at the table.*

*Follow the music with a prayer, also from the back of the sanctuary. If you don't have music, go straight from the end of the play to the prayer. The following is a suggested prayer:*

Our God,

Make of our living

a habit of giving.

May the basic needs of others

Be a priority

in our culture of magnified personal wants.

And may we be uneasy

eating the Lord's supper

as long as there are those that hunger—

as long as there are the least of these

whose needs are not yet met—

as long as Jesus is not fully present.

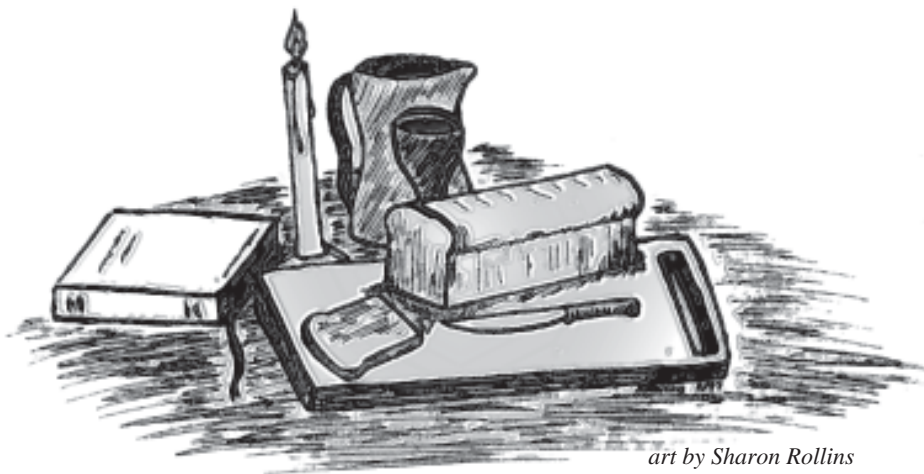
All this we pray in the name of the one

whose voice disturbs us

from the very back of where we're comfortable.

Amen.

*—John Ballenger is a pastor and writer in Decatur, Georgia where he lives with his wife Susan, also a minister, their cat Lewis, and their dog Layla. He has been the Seeds drama and poetry editor for ten years.*



*art by Sharon Rollins*

# A Kid Started It

## an activity for children

by Jackie Saxon and Katie Cook

### CAST:

- Jesus
- Philip
- Andrew
- Boy with Lunch
- One of the Twelve (10 of them—name them if you want)
- Person in Crowd (assign this to all children who don't have another part)

### SET:

- green blanket for grass
- “rock” for Jesus to sit on (could be a chair with a blanket draped over it, a tree stump, a large turned-over bucket, etc.)

### PROPS:

- at least twelve baskets
- one child's lunch box (a *Lion King* one would be fun)
- construction-paper bread loaves and fish (enough for each child to have one)
- a large banner (or posterboard, or large map of the world) with the words “What Can One Kid Do?”

### COSTUMES:

- 8 1/2 x 11 posterboard pieces (with string attached to hang around children's necks) inscribed with the name of each character

This activity was designed for a children's camp, but it can be used in Sunday school, Vacation Bible School, or any other Christian education setting. Have the props and “costumes” ready when the children arrive. (Depending on time and resources, you may prefer to let the children dress up in “period” costumes.) Assign roles. (You may want to do this by ballot, so that the children are sure there is no favoritism; you would simply write down the names of the characters on slips of paper, fold them, and let the children draw them out of a basket.)

Let the children help you lay out the “set.” (An alternative idea would be perhaps to take the children outside if there is a suitable place for it. You could bring them inside for the last part.)

Ask the actors to take their places—Jesus will be on the “rock” and the others will be gathered around. Scatter the Twelve among the Crowd. You will probably want Philip to be close to Boy with Lunch. Make sure Boy with Lunch has the lunch box. Depending on how many teachers or helpers you have, ask them to sit among the children and help them

listen for their part. After asking them to listen carefully for their parts, read John 6:1-14 to them. When you have read through the scripture, ask the children to go over what their role calls for.

Next, tell them that you are going to read through the passage again, and their job is to act it out as you read. Tell them this is the dress rehearsal. Then read the passage slowly, prompting them if you need to. Plan your pauses so that each speaking actor will have a chance to speak his or her part. Then go through it once more, “for real.”

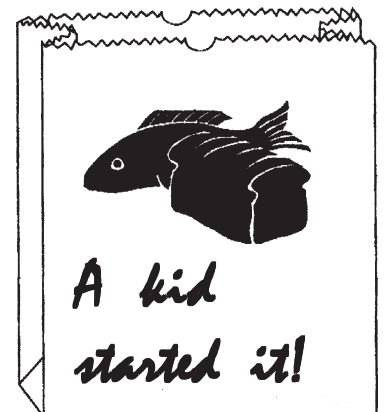
If you are outside, after this would be the time to go back inside to “process” what they have acted out. Talk to them about hunger. You could say something like “Just as the people with Jesus that day were hungry, there are hungry people in our world and in our community.” Talk about how, once the boy shared, there was enough for everyone.

Make sure the banner or sign saying “What Can One Kid Do?” is prominently displayed. (You might consider using an old, large map of the world for this.) Pass out the construction-paper loaves and fish. Talk about how Jesus still cares about hungry people and wants us to do what we can to help them. Ask each one to think of something he or she can do to help hungry people, to write it down on the construction paper, and tape it to the banner.

Then remind the children that in the Bible story it was a “kid” who started it. End with a prayer that God would help each one to know how to help hungry people.

Note: The idea for this activity was inspired by the “A Kid Started It” campaign created by the hunger program of the Presbyterian Church USA. The folks at the hunger program produced colorful T-shirts that said “A Kid Started It” with loaves-and-fishes art—with matching temporary “tattoos.”

The tattoos, they reported, were wildly successful. If you have the time and resources to produce some kind of “souvenir” of this activity, it would help to reinforce the children's memories of the story—and especially the knowledge that it was, indeed, a child who first gave up his lunch.



—Jackie Saxon is a minister in Austin, Texas. Katie Cook is the *Seeds of Hope* editor.