

# The Feeding of the Multitude

## A Service of Communion

by Carolyn C. & Larry K. Dipboye

Scripture: Mark 6:30ff, Matthew 14:13-21, Luke 9:10-17, John 6:1ff

*Note: This service is designed to be observed around a number of tables and first took place at the end of a banquet. This, of course, can be adapted to your congregation's needs. Before the service, place a filled chalice or goblet in the middle of each table, and cover it with a cloth napkin. Place enough bread for each table on a central Communion Table where the communicants will stand. The part of this service needed by the congregation is printed on the 2005 Hunger Emphasis place mat.*

### Litany of Hunger

LEADER ONE: People of God, we have gathered this banquet at the invitation of our friends, reminded that all of God's children share our common hunger for food and drink.

PEOPLE: We have eaten our fill. Our thirst is quenched. But the gnawing need remains deep within our selves. We hunger and thirst for righteousness.

LEADER TWO: Hear the word of our Lord: "Do not work for the food that perishes, but for the food that endures for eternal life, which the Son of Man will give you."

PEOPLE: Jesus said, "I am the bread of life."

LEADER ONE: We remember the ancestors who ate manna in the wilderness, and died.

PEOPLE: "This is the bread that comes down from heaven, so that one may eat of it and not die."

LEADER TWO: We hear the invitation of our Lord: "I am the living bread that came down from heaven. Whoever eats of this bread will live forever; and the bread that I will give for the life of the world is my flesh."

LEADER ONE: Let us pray with Christ:

The Lord's Prayer  
in unison ("trespasses")

### Invitation to the Table

Please appoint a disciple from each table. The napkin covering the filled cup on each table is to be used to receive the bread. When called, each disciple will come to the Communion Table and receive the bread for his/her table. After the disciples return to their tables, the communicants will present the meditation. When the communicants give the "cue," the disciples will pass the bread around their tables. After each person has taken a piece of the bread, each table will pass their cup and take Communion by intinction (dip the bread in the cup, and eat).

### The Meditation

LEADER ONE: The Feeding of the Multitude is the only miracle reported in each of the four Gospels and twice in Mark and Matthew, indicating something of its significance in the early church. What was the source of that significance? Perhaps it resided in its being yet one more indication of the compassionate nature of one who cared and called his church to care for the whole person. This one who touched and healed people's infirmities was touched by their hunger. Send them on their way? Let them fend for themselves? Give in to a sense of helplessness and resignation before a mounting need? "No," Jesus said. "You give them something to eat." It was as simple as that.

LEADER TWO: In terms of practicality, sending people home was the reasonable thing to do. It would have required better than a half year's wages to feed them, and everyone knew they didn't have that kind of money. "What do you have?" Jesus asked. "Look around and assess what you have at hand. You will be surprised at how far it can go."

Perhaps the story was a reminder to those who would gather in the years,



decades and centuries to come: “Those who are faithful in a very little are faithful also in much.” Feeding the hungry does not wait on our amassing resources and wealth. It waits on our faithfulness with what we have.

LEADER ONE: The story is yet one more remembrance of Jesus at table. It’s actually hard to imagine Jesus’ ministry apart from his sitting at table in the homes of Zacchaeus, Martha and Mary, Pharisees, and tax collectors—also in the Upper Room, at Emmaus, and beside the seashore with his disciples. The table was a place of communion—yes—but more than that, it became a classroom—a classroom where by word and example walls of separation were obliterated.

LEADER TWO: Remember the Parable of the Great Banquet? “Go into the highways and hedges and invite the lame and the poor and the despised to table.” There in the wilderness Jesus enacted the parable into real life. They were all there—men, women, children, the sick, the disabled, the possessed, those branded “Sinner” and perhaps even a few Samaritans and Gentiles.

There they were, holding, as always, to the shadows, slinking around the edges of the crowd, hoping no one would notice. “Come to the table,” Jesus said. “Take and eat. This is my body which is for *you*.” Gathered through God’s surprising grace, they came and ate, for *this* table is an inclusive table. *This* table, if it is Christ’s table, is open to all who will come.

LEADER ONE: In the unfolding of Christian history the feeding of the multitude became known as “the Galilean Eucharist.” In early Christian art, the Lord’s Supper was pictured not only as the bread and the cup but as loaves and fish. Similarity to the Lord’s Supper is obvious and apparently intentional, but who knows which way the influence flowed?

Perhaps from the beginning, the story was told as an event that anticipated the ritual in the Upper Room where Jesus celebrated the Passover with his disciples. However, the central significance of baptism and the Lord’s Supper for the first Christians was such that it literally bled into the Gospels out of the daily practice of the church.

Especially in John, words like *water*, *wine*, and *bread* ring bells signaling a deeper meaning as symbols of baptism and the Lord’s Supper. Every careful interpreter of the Fourth Gospel knows that you have to read between the lines and behind the scenes. So, the feeding of the multitude in John is followed by reference to the manna in the wilderness and the astounding statement, “I am the bread of life,” with obvious allusion to the Lord’s Supper.

LEADER TWO: Perhaps the most telling tie between the Galilean miracle and the Lord’s Supper is the ritual

language Jesus uses in distributing the food to the multitude. The multiplication of the loaves and fish follows a ritual familiar to the church and verbs that belong with the institution of the Lord’s Supper. Lifting the bread, Jesus “took,” “blessed,” “broke,” and “gave” to the disciples to distribute to the people. And the people “took” and “ate.”

LEADER ONE: So we are reminded today of the feeding of the multitude as we remember the events of the final Passover of Jesus and his disciples.

LEADER TWO: It is written that on the night he was betrayed, when Jesus gathered his disciples in the Upper Room, he took the bread of the Passover and gave new meaning to the ancient ritual of God’s People.

#### The Blessing

LEADER ONE: (*Lifts up the loaf and breaks it in two pieces*) Jesus blessed the bread and broke it saying, “This is my body that is for you.”

*The bread is passed around the tables. Participants hold their pieces.*

LEADER TWO: (*Lifts the cup*) Then he took a cup, and after giving thanks he gave it to them, saying, “Drink from it, all of you. This is my blood of the covenant, poured out for the forgiveness of sin.”

*The cups are passed around the tables. Participants dip and eat.*

#### The Commission

LEADER: “As often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord’s death until he comes.”

PEOPLE: We have received the bread and the cup, the body and blood of Christ. We are filled with Christ.

LEADER: Jesus told his disciples, “Gather up the fragments left over, so that nothing may be lost.”

*The appointed disciples bring the remaining bread and wine to the Table.*

LEADER ONE: Behold, the fragments of our feast. The banquet of the Kingdom of God goes on.

PEOPLE: At the Table of the Lord, there is always more than enough.

LEADER TWO: We have come to this Table at the bidding of our Lord. Now let us “go out into the roads and lanes, and compel people to come in, so that God’s house and all God’s children may be filled.”

*—Larry & Carolyn Dippo are copastors of a church in Oakridge, Tennessee. This service is from the April 2005 convocation of the Alliance of Baptists, held in Greenville, South Carolina.*

# A Meditation for Children

by Katie Cook

You're going to be skeptical when you hear this idea, but I assure you that I tried it at my church, and it worked out quite nicely. The children were first-, second-, and third-graders, and it was a small group. It should work for older children (and youth and adults) as well.

We met in a Sunday school room (not one of theirs) after the children's sermon in "Big Church." Ashley, our children's minister, started by talking about different kinds of prayer. Then she turned the program over to me. I asked the children to lie down (we had couches, but a carpeted floor would work) and get comfortable. Then I asked them to close their eyes and listen as I read a story about Jesus and a little boy. I told them that this was a way of meditating that adults sometimes used, and that I thought they could do it, too.

I told them that I would read the story through once, and that they would recognize it. Then I would read it again, and I wanted them to imagine that they were there, with Jesus and the others, on that day. They seemed to feel free to ask questions when they didn't understand something, which was good.

I had chosen the story of the Feeding of the Multitude from John 6:1-13, because it included the small boy who had given his lunch. I paraphrased in places, hopefully making it easier for them to follow. I stressed the importance of children in the story.

We read through the story the first time, and they listened, with their eyes closed. Then I asked them to close their eyes again and pretend that they were there in Galilee on that day. I talked about what the weather might be like, and the Palestinian terrain, and the crowds. One of them asked, "Who should we be in this story?" I told him he should decide who he wanted to be.

Then I read through the story again, prompting them in places to imagine what it was like. "Imagine that you can feel the sun on your face. What does that feel like? What kind of clothes are people wearing? What are you wearing? What sounds do you hear? Can you feel the breeze on your face? Is it hot?" I stressed that everyone in the crowd had all they wanted to eat. One of the children asked how large I thought the twelve baskets were. I said, "I don't know; what do you think?" He said he imagined they were pretty big.

After that, they sat up and I asked them a few questions about what had gone on in their minds. One of them had decided to be the small boy. One

of them said she was a little girl in the crowd. One them said that he was everybody at the same time. One said he was a fish—not one of the fish that got eaten, but one in the lake, listening to what was going on. All of them seemed to have understood the story and enjoyed imagining that they were there.

I didn't mention any morals to the story. My hope, and Ashley's hope, is that they will pick this up on their own. What they were supposed to be doing was learning about meditation. Hopefully they learned something about miracles of abundance as well.

—Katie Cook is the editor for *Seeds of Hope* publications *Sacred Seasons* and *Hunger News & Hope*, as well as *Baptist Peacemaker*, the journal/newspaper of the *Baptist Peace Fellowship of North America*.

## Communion Prayer

As we come to your table today, O Lord,  
As we accept the bread you offer,  
and the wine you pour for us,  
Help us to remember the life you lived for us,  
And the words you taught us.  
Help us to understand the meaning of love.

We miss the mark so often, Lord,  
Ignoring the needy who reach out to us,  
Judging those who are different from us,  
Asking more of others than we ourselves  
are willing to give.

Open our eyes to the meaning of love.

Let our feet be quick to answer the cries  
of the wounded,  
Let our hands lift up the fallen,  
Let our wealth bring healing to the sick.  
So we shall live the meaning of love,  
O Christ. Amen.

—Mary Ruth Crook,  
*Fresh from the Word: Prayers of Praise and Thanksgiving*

# I Just Want You to Know I'm Here

A Monologue

by Katie Cook

You don't know me, but I'm a child of God, so I guess that makes me your sister.

I live in Zimbabwe, where, because of several years of drought and political unrest, there are no roads, and there is nothing left of what you call the infrastructure, so we all go without food regularly. I live in the rubble of Baghdad, hiding from those who fight, hoping the humanitarian workers can make it through to me and my children with food and clean water.

I spend my days in an Afghan refugee camp, making shawls to sell to people like you, hoping that someday my family can have a home again. I work as a prostitute in the mountains of Bolivia, hoping to learn a craft so that I can feed my children some other way. I live in the wreck of the Haitian capitol city, where a person who eats every day is considered to be rich.

I also live much closer than that—in a Sunday school room of an Arkansas church that took me in when my home was destroyed by Hurricane Katrina. I live on a reservation in South Dakota, where I struggle, in the midst of rampant alcoholism and spiraling AIDS cases, to escape the cycle of poverty. I live in the mountains of Appalachia where I help my family scratch a living from the land, and I dream of a high school education.

I also live in your home town. I'm one of those people that you rarely notice, right here in [Central Texas]. I represent 80 percent of the people, in some areas, who come to food pantries and emergency assistance programs for help. I represent women of all ages and circumstances.

I work full-time at the Burger King on Interstate 35. I can almost make ends meet with my salary, but not quite. I'm okay unless one of the kids gets sick or the old car breaks down. Because I'm working, my family lost some of the medical benefits we received before, and now I have to leave my children at home without supervision. But I'm determined to make it somehow.

I'm in the prime of my life, one of the first women to make it into an administrative job at a large factory. I was making good money—even putting some away. But the economy has been bad, and the company started laying people off.

I'm one of the ones who got a pink slip. I've been looking for a job, but, meanwhile, my resources are dwindling fast.

I'm also an elderly woman, trying to survive on my Social Security benefits. I worked hard all my life, thinking that I would have enough from Social Security to make ends meet. I hate having to go to a social service agency and ask for help, but it's really difficult to get all the medications I need, pay rent, and then have money left over for food. You might not believe it to look at me, but there are some months when I have to choose between my medicine and groceries.

I don't want to make you feel bad; I just want you to know that I'm here. I'm here in spite of hard work, in spite of trying to be careful with resources. I want you to promise that you won't forget me, that you'll try to help make things better for people like me. That's all I ask—that you try. Until all of us—ALL of us—have enough to eat, every day.

—Katie Cook is the editor for *Seeds of Hope* publications *Sacred Seasons* and *Hunger News & Hope*, as well as *Baptist Peacemaker*, the journal/newspaper of the Baptist Peace Fellowship of North America.

