

# Hope Is in Our Hands



## **Lessons & Activities about Hunger for Children & Youth**

*from Seeds of Hope Publishers and the Alliance of Baptists*

*art by Lenora Mathis*



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Seeds of Hope, Inc., is a private, independent group of believers responding to a common burden for the poor and hungry of God's world, and acting on the strong belief that biblical mandates to feed the poor were not intended to be optional. The group intends to seek out people of faith who feel called to care for the poor; and to affirm, enable and empower a variety of responses to the problems of poverty.

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## **Lessons & Activities about Hunger for Children & Youth**

### **contents:**

#### **Lessons & Activities for Children:**

- 3 Meditation: *What If You Were There That Day?*  
by Katie Cook
- 4 Story: *Mommy, I'm Hungry*  
by Jeffrey Zurheide
- 5 Activity: *A Kid Started It*  
by Jackie Saxon & Katie Cook
- 6 Activity: *The Rice Bag Treatment*  
by Katie Cook
- 7 Dialogue: *Here Comes the Judge*  
by Mark McClintock
- 9 Story: *The Workers Are Few*  
by Andrea Moore
- 10 Monologue: *A Feast from a Snack*  
by Mark McClintock

#### **Lessons & Activities for Youth**

- 12 Drama: *Three Responses to Hunger*  
by Katie Cook
- 14 Reading: *The Banquet Table*  
by Michele Perry
- 15 Activities for Youth  
by Katie Cook
- 16 Reading: *What Jesus Didn't Say*  
by Katie Cook
- 17 Drama: *Lillian vs. the Galactic Space-Mages of Doom*  
by Rachel Hunter
- 19 Reading: *How He Broke the Bread*  
by Katie Cook
- 20 Reading: *Bread, Rest & Strength for the Journey*  
by John Garland & Katie Cook

## **a word about this resource**

This collection of resources is sponsored by the Alliance of Baptists (AOB) and produced by Seeds of Hope. This year the AOB has enabled Seeds to pull together a collection of children's sermons, dramas and activities from the last nine years of *Sacred Seasons*, a quarterly Seeds worship resource.

The materials in this packet are gifts from ministers, writers and artists who believe strongly in our quest to help congregations to regularly incorporate hunger and justice issues into their worship. We hope you find ideas here to help your children and youth respond to the hungry people in God's world.

—from the Seeds staff and Council of Stewards

# What if You Were There That Day?

## 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 for 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. After introducing the concept of contemplative prayer, 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 encourage you, if you try this activity, to make sure they feel welcome to ask all the questions they need to ask, before you begin reading.

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? What can you smell?" 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 that he was the small boy in the story. 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 would 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.

From *Sacred Seasons, Hunger Emphasis* 2005, "You Have Heard the Cries of the Poor."



art by Rebecca S. Ward

# “Mommy, I’m Hungry”

## A Children’s Sermon

by Jeffrey Zurheide

I have offered a children’s time during the morning worship services at our church, for the past five or so years, with several goals in mind: first, to give the children a sense that they are important; second, to incarnate in some way the approachability of God through my interactions with them; and third, to leave them with one simple truth from the biblical theme of that service. (And, of course, the adults often gain much from the overflow.)

On one particular Hunger Emphasis Sunday, I decided to try to press home a simple phrase I had heard used by another worship leader at a Hunger Forum: “Mommy, I’m hungry.”

In order to bring this all-too-familiar request to life (my own children probably say it themselves three times an afternoon), I asked five members of the congregation to stand up one by one and say “Mommy, I’m hungry” in languages other than English. Our choices were Spanish, French, German, Japanese and Norwegian, but you may have many other options in your faith community.

After each of the five finished reciting from different places in the sanctuary, I turned to the children and asked what that was all about. After receiving little feedback except puzzled shrugs and “I dunno’s,” I told them what each person had said: “Mommy, I’m hungry.”

I then asked if they ever used that line themselves. They all came alive, saying things like “Yeah, when I get home from school I ask for a snack” and “I say that just before dinner.” I pointed out that, in many households in our culture, families eat three meals a day, *plus* snacks.

They all agreed, and after allowing them to tell me about their favorite snacks, I asked them what they thought the children of Sudan, Somalia, North Korea, or war-torn Bosnia snack on. They all pretty much agreed, “probably nothing.”

I then spoke a bit about the relative abundance of food in our own land—supermarkets crammed with almost any food one could imagine, and “all you can eat” restaurants. And then I tried to wrap things up with a few concrete “what we can do’s.”

I mentioned prayer and contributing to the various food drives in which our church participates, but I also invited them to walk in our town’s upcoming CROP Walk, to help feed hungry people with their own two feet.

I concluded with another mention of “Mommy, I’m hungry” asking them to think about all of the mommies (parents) of the world who can only respond “I know, but I have nothing to give you.” We also closed with a prayer for our world’s hungry children.

One never knows what children may glean from such an experience together. We did have a greater number of them participate in our recent CROP Walk, but beyond that, I pray that they might grow up with a greater sensitivity to the reality of hunger and poverty—and by God’s grace decrease it tomorrow. For they are tomorrow’s adults; tomorrow’s citizens of the world.

—At this writing, Jeff Zurheide was the pastor of First Baptist Church in Wilton, Connecticut. From *Sacred Seasons, Hunger Emphasis 1998*, “I Was Hungry and You Fed Me.”



art by Lenora Mathis

# A Kid Started It

## An Activity for Children

by Jackie Saxon and Katie Cook

### CAST OF CHARACTERS:

- Jesus
- Philip
- Andrew
- Boy with Lunch (this could be a girl!)
- 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 12 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.



art by Lenora Mathis



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, a former minister to youth and children, is a recruiter for Austin Presbyterian Theological Seminary in Austin, Texas. Katie Cook is the *Seeds of Hope* editor. From *Sacred Seasons, Hunger Emphasis 2001: God’s Banquet*.

# The Rice Bag Treatment

## A Hunger Awareness Activity for Children

by Katie Cook

text: 1 John 3:16-18

This is an activity that will help your children to realize that many people in the world don’t have enough to eat. They will also be able to share this knowledge with the adults in your congregation.

You will need enough rice to make bags of two ounces each for every family in attendance on, say, a Wednesday evening or a Sunday morning. You will also need enough plastic recloseable “baggies” for each. (The “snack” size works best.) Bring several one-fourth-cup measuring cups and several large bowls.

You will also need cards or pieces of paper printed with something like the following:

*This two ounces of rice represents the daily diet of 852 million people in the world. More than half of these are children. Imagine that you have this small bag of rice as your only food for the day, and that you probably have to walk a distance to get the water in which to cook it.*

You might want to add something about supporting a hunger project in your church or denomination, with contact information. (If that is not applicable, you might suggest that they support one of the development projects such as Church World Service or Oxfam, or get involved



in the local CROP Walk.) You might also consider asking the children to write notes on the cards, encouraging folks to help these hungry people. Have the cards or pieces of paper ready when the activity begins.

Empty the rice into the large bowls, separate the children into teams and ask them to measure it into the snack bags. Ask them to put one-fourth cup (two ounces) in each bag. Once they’ve done that, ask them to insert a card in each bag, or attach a card to each.

While they are working (you could also do this before or after), discuss with the children about how Jesus talked a lot about giving food to hungry people. Read the passage from 1 John 3:16-18 to them. Explain that these bags are to remind all of us of the hungry people we have been asked to help, so that none of us forgets our responsibility as Christians.

When all the bags are ready, plan a time for the children to distribute these bags to the adults. You might consider asking one of the children to explain what the project is about. The impact should be significant.

—This activity came from the CROP Walk materials produced by Church World Service ([www.churchworldservice.org](http://www.churchworldservice.org).)

art by Peter Yuichi Clark

# Here Comes the Judge!

## A Children's Sermon

by Mark McClintock

text: Matthew 25:31-46

**A**uthor's Note: This is one of the two-character sermons that I have used with my ventriloquism puppet, Sidney. It can easily be done as a dialogue between two people or with any sort of puppet. Remember—adaptation is one of God's creative gifts to us! When the dialogue begins, Sidney is wearing a robe.

MARK: Hi, Sidney. Are you joining the choir today?

SIDNEY: Nope. I was watching Judge Judy this week and decided that's what I'd like to be when I grow up. A judge. So I gotta get started practicing.

MARK: I see. And why do you want to be a judge?

SIDNEY: I really like the way judges decide who's innocent and who's guilty. And I like the way they make people

look really foolish. I think I'm kinda good at that already.

MARK: At making people look foolish?

SIDNEY: Sure, I've been practicing on you for years. 'Course, most people aren't as easy to make look foolish as you are. So I gotta work on it some more.

MARK: Well, it's very interesting that you want to be a judge, Sidney, because our Gospel lesson this morning describes the way Jesus will judge everyone who has ever lived. He calls it separating the sheep from the goats.

SIDNEY: Who ever heard of a judge for sheep and goats?

MARK: It's just a sort of picture, Sidney. People who do what God has created us to do are like the sheep. People who don't are like the goats. You know the difference between sheep and goats, don't you?

SIDNEY: 'Course, I do. Sheep don't have horns to hit you with.

MARK: Yes, but—

SIDNEY: There's no butts about it!

MARK: I was going to say that some sheep in some parts of the world do have horns. But horns are not what God looks for in us humans.

SIDNEY: So what does God look for?

MARK: Sheep know that they depend on their shepherd, and they follow the shepherd wherever he leads them.

SIDNEY: I don't have to eat grass, do I?

MARK: No, but you do need to follow Jesus' example and do the things Jesus did.

SIDNEY: Like turn water into wine?

MARK: No, like taking care of people's needs. In Matthew 25, Jesus says, "I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, I was naked and you gave me clothing—"

SIDNEY: Thank goodness you did that!

MARK: "—I was sick and you took care of me, I was in prison and you visited me."



SIDNEY: What did I do THAT for, Jesus?

MARK: That's what the people in the story asked. Jesus replied, "Whenever you did it for one of the least of these, you did it for me, too."

SIDNEY: Oh, I get it. You're supposed to give food to someone who's hungry and something to drink to someone who's thirsty?

MARK: Exactly.

SIDNEY: Aha! I told you I wanted an extra doughnut this morning, and you didn't give me one, did you?

MARK: No, I didn't, but—

SIDNEY: Guilty! And when I asked for a Coca Cola with breakfast, did you get me one?

MARK: Of course not, I—

SIDNEY: Guilty again! And don't forget that Bart Simpson T-shirt I asked you for at the store the other day. You didn't buy it for me, right?

MARK: No—

SIDNEY: Guilty, guilty, and double guilty! You goat, you.

MARK: Sidney, Jesus wasn't talking about giving things to a person who already has good things to eat and drink and wear. Jesus was talking about helping people that hardly anyone pays attention to. Like families who have lost their homes. And people who live in countries where there is not enough food to go around. And people who are sick and are treated unfairly.

SIDNEY: Oh. Like that kid in my class at school, George, whose dad lost his job. Everyone makes fun of him 'cause he has holes in his shirts and his shoes, and he's really skinny and he gets all the answers wrong. He has six brothers and sisters just like him.

MARK: That's exactly the kind of person Jesus was talking about. Have you done anything to be his friend?

SIDNEY: Uh...no...I laughed at him just like the others. I'm guilty! Guess I'm one of the goats, too. (Bleating) Baaaaaa...

MARK: The good news, Sidney, is that Jesus will help you become a sheep. Ask Jesus for the courage and the wisdom to know how to help George and others in the world who are in need, and he promises to help you.

SIDNEY: Well, it won't be easy, but if Jesus will help me do it, I can do it! Even if it's only one person at a time.

MARK: If each of us sheep will make that commitment, think of all the people we can help!

SIDNEY: Cool! Can you help me out of this robe?

MARK: You don't want to be a judge anymore?

SIDNEY: No way! I want the best job of all—a sheep who follows Jesus!

MARK: We can all do that job. Let's pray. *Merciful God, we thank you for being a judge who has given us an endless number of chances to change our ways and do what is right and just for*

**"Sydney, Jesus wasn't talking about giving things to a person who already has good things to eat and drink and wear. Jesus was talking about helping people that hardly anyone pays attention to."**

*people in need. Help us have the courage and wisdom and strength to share and help others, in Jesus' name. Amen.*

SIDNEY: Amen! Say, Mark, do you think I'd look good in wool?

*—Mark McClintock is the director of PassportKids, a summer children's camping program. He lives in Birmingham, Alabama, with his wife Michelle, his daughter Maggie and several ventriloquist's puppets. From Sacred Seasons, Hunger Emphasis 2003, "Let All Who Are Hungry Come in and Eat."*

## Interruption

A few years ago Ann Sims, the leader of a girls' mission education group in Waco, Texas, asked a young man to come to their meeting dressed as a homeless man. He went to the local emergency assistance agency and "researched" his part, and afterwards rehearsed with the girls' leader. Then, on cue, he "interrupted" the girls' meeting, asking for a couple of dollars.

The leader, showing no fear, began questioning him gently, asking where he slept, how he found his food and how he became homeless. The girls were mesmerized and profoundly impressed by the experience.

A key to the success of this occurrence would be in the manner of conversation between the actor and the leader. In this case, she treated him with dignity, and he answered candidly and intelligently.—lkc



# The Workers Are Few

## A Children's Sermon

by Andrea H. Moore

text: Matthew 9 and 10



art by Erin Kennedy Mayer

“The harvest is plentiful but the workers are few.” “Freely you have received, freely give.” *[Repeat this while dressing in work clothes; gloves, hat, shirt, and boots.]* Okay, I think I understand now what the Bible is telling us. *The harvest is plentiful, but the workers are few.*

I am ready to work in the garden. I’ve got my work boots on, and this shirt will help shade my arms because I burn easily; this hat is perfect to protect my fair complexion, and these gloves—well, we don’t want to get our hands dirty, do we?

Now, for the next part: “Freely you have received, freely give.” Hmm, this one’s a bit harder. I have received a lot of free things in my life. And, really, I have so much stuff in my closets and in my garage.

Maybe instead of having a garage sale, I will just give this old stuff away. It’s not my style, and it was probably given to me anyway. I am ready to serve God. I’ll grow some tasty vegetables in my garden, and I’ll finally do some spring cleaning.

Do you think that is what the Bible is telling us—to work in our gardens and give our yucky stuff away to someone to make us feel better? No.

It saddens me, but sometimes I think we forget to really read the Bible thinking about what God wants us to know. Too often we read the stories and make up our own selfish meaning—maybe because we don’t want to do what the Bible asks us to do.

Let’s look again at what these two scripture verses mean. “The harvest is plentiful, but the workers are few.” Jesus told this to his disciples when they were walking through a small town. As Jesus saw the crowds of people, he became sad. He saw many people who were helpless, sick, hungry and in need

of love and care. He compared all those people to a harvest.

Do any of you know what a harvest is? Harvest is the time when plants, fruits, vegetables and grains are ready to be picked and brought in. Jesus said that there are many people out there who need to be helped, who need to be cared for, who need to be taught about God.

We don’t need these things (*gardening props*) to care for the harvest Jesus talks about, and sometimes we do need to get our hands dirty to really serve and care for others.

Now for the second verse “Freely you have received, freely give.” Jesus wasn’t telling his disciples to take stuff to Goodwill or to give just their junk to others. He was telling them to give the love of God to others, just as they have been freely given God’s love. The harvest is full. There are many people who need us. Freely give to others what you have been given, share God’s love and serve others.

What would happen if we all did what the Bible tells us to do? I’ll bet we would be living in another kind of world and that we would be another kind of church. Think of ways you can help those who are hungry and in need of God’s great love. Can we together follow Jesus’ instructions this week?

The harvest is plentiful, and yet the workers are few. God always needs another good worker. Maybe someone will see you serving others and join in! After church, share some ideas with your family about how you can be God’s special helper this week.

—Andrea Moore is a former children’s minister, and a mother of five, living in Waco, Texas. From *Sacred Seasons, Hunger Emphasis 1999: The Bread of Deliverance*.

# Feast from a Snack

## A Monologue for a Child

by Mark McClintock

based on John 6:1-15

*Editor's Note: The following is a monologue meant to be delivered by a young boy. If you'd like to make this authentic, he should be costumed as a peasant child from the first century. He could be carrying a basket.*

**Y**ou should've seen it! It was a miracle! And it was me who helped Jesus do it. I mean, it was I who helped Jesus do it. I mean...it was Jesus who helped me.

We'd heard of him and the things he done...I mean, did...on the other side of the sea. But we never thought he'd pass through our little fishing village! When he did, it was like a holiday. A crowd of people was following him. Some of the men stopped working to see him. My father wanted to go, but he and my older brothers had to repair our boat.

Mama said, "Send Joel," —that's me— "he's no help to you anyway." To tell the truth, I am a little clumsy, and Papa easily loses his patience with me.

"But Mama," I said, "I have to go to shul."

"What for?" she said. "You think the rabbi will care?"

I don't think he would. He scolds me for asking too much...I mean, too many questions and tells me I should work harder on my Hebrew.

Still, I didn't want to go. I knew this new teacher would think I was stupid, too. And besides, I hadn't eaten breakfast yet. Papa and my brothers took up all the space at our small table. Every morning, I waited until they were finished, and now I wouldn't get anything.

Mama rolled her eyes and said one of her little blessings over me...the kind where she pulls me by my ear. She took some fish out of the salt and some loaves of bread and rolled them all up in a cloth and stuffed them in my arms and blessed me out the door.

So that's why I followed Jesus. It was a long walk up the mountain

where I once got in trouble for playing when I should have been in shul. I was starving, and I ate half the food Mama had given me along the way. Some of the other boys had skipped shul, too, but their parents were with them, so they didn't get in trouble.

When we finally reached the mountaintop, it was amazing! All these sick people had come, or people had brought them for Jesus to heal. He made Obed, the lame beggar, stand up and walk. I saw it with my own eyes! He made blind people see, and deaf people hear and crooked people stand up straight.

After awhile, I got tired of watching. Some of the other boys started a game of tag, but they didn't ask me to play. They hardly ever did. Later, they started complaining to their parents that they were hungry. I stuffed my bundle of food in my tunic. If they weren't going to invite me to play, I sure wasn't going to share my lunch with them.

Finally, Jesus stopped healing and started teaching. The things he said were different from the rabbi in my village. He talked about the meek and loving your enemy. And the stories he told! A shepherd who went after a lost sheep. And a son who was a bigger fool than me, but his father loved him anyway. I could have listened to him tell stories all day.

But then he stopped and told these men to find food for everybody. They looked at him like he was crazy. To tell the truth, I thought so, too. There was millions of people standing around Jesus. Or at least thousands. Nobody seemed to think of bringing any food except me.

To tell the truth, I would've shared my food, but I knew my Mama wouldn't like it. Well, I knew she would've blessed me for being foolish. There was only a little left, and everybody would've laughed at



me if I'd offered to share it. To tell the truth, I wanted to keep the rest for myself.

But then one of the little children near me started crying. I knew she was hungry. And I thought, maybe she needed the food more than me. So when the men came back to Jesus, I showed one what I had. I meant for him to take it to Jesus, but instead he took me with him. Now I knew everyone would laugh at me.

But Jesus just said, "Sit everyone down and bring some baskets." Then he took my food and said a prayer—a short one, not like the ones our rabbi says that make your back ache. And he started breaking the bread and the fish into little pieces. Somehow, he filled up a whole basket and handed it to me.

Me! He asked me to help!

"You wanted to share it?" he said.

I went straight to that little girl and gave her some. Then I passed the basket around until it was empty. When I took it back to Jesus, I couldn't believe it!

There were five more baskets full of fish and bread! It took forever to give it all out. And when we were done, there were twelve basketfuls of leftovers! I know I looked stupid standing there, staring at them. But Jesus put his arm around me and said, "Don't ever think what you have to give is unimportant. God can make a feast out of a snack."

Some things haven't changed much. The rabbi still says I ask too many questions. A few of the other boys still make fun of me, but most of the children invite me to play with them now. My Mama says my head has grown bigger, but my cap still fits, so I think she's just blessing me again. And I still have to wait for my father and big brothers to go fishing before I can have breakfast at the table.

**I know I looked stupid standing there, staring at them. But Jesus put his arm around me and said, "Don't ever think what you have to give is unimportant. God can make a feast out of a snack."**

But to tell the truth, after that day with Jesus, nothing is the same. No matter what anybody else thinks, I know I'm important to Jesus and I can serve God. And you know what? At Jesus' table, there will always be a place for me.

—Mark McClintock is the director of PassportKids, a summer children's camping program. He lives in Birmingham, Alabama, with his wife Michelle, his daughter Maggie and several ventriloquist's puppets.

## Children Make Great Advocates for the Poor

Children write wonderful letters to their Senators and Representatives, if given age-appropriate sample letters and directions. Help younger children write letters to their members of Congress. They can decorate a paper plate with a drawing of their favorite food or a picture of a developing-world child or farmer.

On the back, help them write a simple message about hunger in our nation and world. You can go to the Bread for the World (BFW) web site at [www.bread.org](http://www.bread.org), and find out what the current BFW Offering of Letters is about.

Each year, BFW chooses a piece of legislation that will help alleviate hunger in the US or around the world, and encourages churches and individuals to write Congress about that bill.

You will find, on the BFW web site, sample letters, as well as addresses for US Senators and Representatives.

Sharon Rollins, a children's Sunday school teacher in Waco, Texas, asked her students, as part of a lesson on hunger, to write letters or draw pictures on salad-sized paper plates.

She found that one of these plates, folded in half, fit perfectly in a small standard envelope. She and the children addressed the envelopes, inserted the paper plates, stamped them and sent them with other letters from her church to a blessing ceremony at World Hunger Relief Incorporated (WHRI) Training Farm in Elm Mott, Texas. After the blessing, WHRI staff mailed them, along with letters from several other churches.

# Three Responses to Hunger

## *A Mini-Drama for Children and Youth*

by Katie Cook

**T**his trio of monologues was first used with youth and children in a small church in Shamrock, Texas. The three readers were teenagers. While they read, a pantomime was performed in the center of the worship platform by older children (ages 8-12). These children, part of a small mime group called the Parable Players, wore black t-shirts and jeans. Older teenage girls had skillfully applied mime make-up on the actors' faces. One of them, whose attire was inspired by the character of Jesus in Godspell, also wore clown-like pants and a Superman shirt. Below is an adaptation of the Parable Players' mini-drama.

Before the readers begin, the Jesus-like player (PP1) comes onto the stage with an empty bowl and sits dejectedly on the floor. The readers are in the congregation, near the front but not sitting together.

### **First Monologue**

This reader evokes cynicism and perhaps some angry defensiveness. As he/she begins to read, the second player (PP2) begins walking down the aisle to the stage. He/she is wearing a stereo with headphones, moving a little to the music. When PP2 sees PP1, he/she makes a wide arc around him/her, visibly agitated—perhaps fearful—but pretending not to see anything. As the first reader finishes, PP2 leaves the sanctuary.

I see it on television all the time—pictures of kids in Burma and Central America, and food riots in Somalia, and they're supposed to be starving, and I'm supposed to do something about it. And all of these bleeding-heart people come to me and say, "If you are a Christian, you have to do something." And they say, "If you are really a Christian, you will care about all of these hungry people."



art by Sharon R. Rollins

Well, this is my answer to all of them—the ones who try to lay a guilt trip on me, just because I happen to be more fortunate than other people:

It is my right and privilege to have good things, because I am an American and because I am a Christian. Didn't God say in the Old Testament, "If you obey me, you will become rich"? I hear preachers on television say it all the time. God wants me to have good things.

So why should I feel guilty because there are starving people somewhere? It isn't my fault that they are poor. They ought to get out and find a job. They ought to stop having so many babies.

And besides, I have heard that the money we send to Africa and other places doesn't get to the starving people at all. It just goes into the pockets of the government over there. And most of those governments are Marxist, anyway. So why should we help them? They are our enemies.

No, I am not responsible for those people. It is not my problem. If they're going to die, let them do it. The world is getting too crowded with people anyway.

### **Second Monologue**

As this reader begins, a third player (PP3) comes down the aisle, notices PP1, and stops a short distance from PP1, looking toward him/her. As the reader continues, PP3 continues looking at PP1, who holds out his/her arms to PP3. As the reader says, "and so I do nothing" PP3 goes back up the aisle and out of the sanctuary.

I came to talk to you about the problem of hunger in this world. I don't agree with the person who just spoke to



you. I can't watch reports about earthquakes and cyclones on the news or see a picture of a hungry child in a magazine without breaking down and crying. It is such a dreadful problem. It is such a terrible thing to have people in our world, even people in our own country, who are starving to death.

But I feel paralyzed. I feel helpless. What can I do? What can one person do? It would take millions and millions of dollars to collect the grain and then ship it all the way across the world, and then to get it from the ships to the people. It would take millions of dollars and thousands of people to get the starving people back on their feet, to help them start growing crops again and find clean water to drink.

It would take hundreds and hundreds of doctors to take care of the diseases that chronic hunger causes. And it would take who knows how many experts to make sure that the food and supplies get to the people who need them.

I don't know what to do. My heart breaks every time I think about it. But what can I do? I'm only 15 years old, and I have to go to high school. I have no money of my own. My parents have no money to spare. What can one person do? I don't know what to do. And so I do nothing.

### Third Monologue

*As the third reader begins, the fourth player (PP4) begins to come down the aisle. He/she sees PP1, makes eye contact, turns around and goes back. He/she re-enters at the words "we can find a way" with a loaf of bread and a cup of water. He/she takes it to PP1, sits companionably next to him/her while PP1 eats and drinks.*

I have been listening to the first two speakers, and hoping that I can respond to both of them in the right way. My second friend is right; the problem of hunger in the world is so huge that it's hard to even think about it. And it's hard to imagine what one person can do.

But Jesus was pretty clear when he said, "When you did it for one of my brothers and sisters, you did it for me." If we are going to listen to Jesus at all, then we should realize that each face of each starving child is also the face of Jesus Christ.

And if that doesn't make us want to do something, then we could look at the Old Testament. The prophets kept saying, "You're going to be in trouble because your laws make the needy people suffer." The people of Israel didn't listen, and look what happened to them!

The Assyrians wiped them off the face of the earth. And the people of Judah didn't listen, and the Babylonians came in, destroyed the city of Jerusalem, destroyed the

temple and sold the people into slavery.

I think the same thing could happen to us. But still we don't listen. Maybe it's because those starving people are all the way around the world—at least, most of them are.

Maybe it's because we've heard so much about people stealing hunger offerings and governments not letting the donated food get to the people.

**I don't know what to do.  
My heart breaks every time I  
think about it.  
But what can I do?  
I'm only 15 years old, and I  
have to go to high school.**

Maybe it's because somebody told us they aren't worthy of our help—and we are so anxious for excuses, we choose to believe it.

But those excuses are not good enough. Would you like to look Jesus Christ in the face and say, "Well, it wasn't worth the effort because..."?

We can find ways to get the food to the people. There are missionaries and relief workers in those countries, or near them, who can help get the donations where they need to go. We just have to make the effort to find out who they are. There are ways of knowing which organizations can be trusted, and which ones can't. There is no excuse. Even if we aren't rich by US standards, we have more than those children ever dreamed of. We can give our "coke" money for a month. We can wash cars and raise money. We can pray every day for hungry people. We can do it.

I may just be one young person, pretty unimpressive by myself, but I can do something. It doesn't matter how small it is. The boy with a few fishes and loaves didn't have much to give. But he gave it. And I will give what little I can. I can make a difference, and with God's help, I intend to do it.

*The first and second readers join the third reader at the microphone or lectern. The three read from Isaiah 58:6-9. Each reads a verse and then all three read verse 9.*

—Katie Cook is the editor for *Seeds of Hope*. This drama was printed in *Sacred Seasons, Hunger Emphasis 1999, The Bread of Deliverance*, and was updated for this collection.

# The Banquet Table

## An Interpretive Reading for Youth

from a poem by Michele Perry

**N**ote: 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,



art by Sallylynn Askins

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. Michele—a native of Orange Park, Florida—has done everything from serving at an orphanage in Bangladesh to working with children at a camp on Cape Cod to teaching backyard Bible clubs in US inner cities. From Sacred Seasons, Hunger Emphasis 2001, "God's Banquet."*

# Activities for Youth

## (To Raise Awareness of Hunger Issues)

by Katie Cook

### Who is My Neighbor?

*An Activity for Younger Youth*

Before the session, find a large map of the world. (Check it to make sure it shows the continents according to their true relative land masses. Some older maps place North America in the middle and make it appear to be larger than it really is, in comparison to other continents.) Attach the map to the wall of your meeting room. Also procure push pins or thumb tacks of various bright colors, colored construction paper and scissors. People and places in the news now include the Karen people of Burma, almost all of Sub-Saharan Africa (especially Zimbabwe, Niger and Sudan), the Horn of Africa, Central America (especially Colombia and Guatemala), people along the Gulf Coast of the US, rural Mississippi and the Dakotas.

Ask the students to cut small paper dolls out of the construction paper. Then, together with the youth, make a list of places in the world where hunger has been publicized. Ask the students, "What countries have we read about or heard about, who are experiencing the aftermath of a disaster or war? Where are people living in famine or chronic malnutrition?"

Ask the students to pin paper dolls onto the map in countries where they know there is hunger. In almost every case, there will be impoverished people in your own community. If the students do not think of this, you might want to bring it up and pin a doll there.

Then ask, "How are these people related to us?" Help them as they discuss how the lives of these people are connected with their lives. This activity goes well with the story of the compassionate Samaritan (Luke 10:25-37) and the lesson that people in need are our neighbors, whom we are instructed to love.

### Jesus in the News

*An Activity for Older and Younger Youth*

Before the session, secure a quantity of newspapers, some glue sticks, colorful markers and butcher paper or poster board. Distribute them as your students arrive. Read Matthew 25:31-40. Challenge the youth to look in the newspapers for stories about people

whom Jesus might have meant when he said, "If you do it for them, you have done it for me." If they hesitate, prompt them in a subtle way. They may find stories about homeless people, people with AIDS, people on Death Row, refugees—the possibilities are endless.

Once they begin finding appropriate stories, ask them to cut out the stories (if they are fairly short), photographs and headlines. After they have finished, instruct them to glue their findings on the poster board or butcher paper, making a collage. Ask someone with good handwriting to write the following (or ask the students to cut the letters out of construction paper—encourage them to be creative) at the bottom of the collage: "Just as you did it for these, you did it for me."

Keep the collage up for a while in your meeting room, as a reminder of the passage.

### Compassion Panel

*An Activity for Older Youth*

Before the session, collect objects that represent the six ministries described in the Matthew 25:31-40. (For instance, you might bring a can of food or loaf of bread for "I was hungry and you fed me," a glass or cup for "I was thirsty," a flower for "I was sick," and so on.) Also, find six buzzers or bells.

Divide the students into six groups. Give each group one of the objects, and tell them that they are in charge of "feeding the hungry," "visiting the sick," and so on,



*art by Sharon R. Rollins*



according to the object they hold. Ask the teams to sit together, with their “symbols” and a buzzer or bell in front of each team. (The area should look a little like a game show with six panels.)

Explain that you are going to tell several stories, and they are to hit their buzzers or bells as soon as they think their team’s ministry fits the need of the person in the story. (This may make the stories a little disjointed, but it may also give them a more interesting dimension.)

When the teams are ready to begin, relate this story:

*Harry is homeless. He doesn’t remember how long he’s lived on the street. He’s about 50 years old, but he looks like he is 80. He is alcoholic; he says that’s what really caused him to be where he is. He sleeps in a cardboard box on a heating grate. He sits on the sidewalk in Manhattan every day and asks for change so that he can get food—and sometimes alcohol. He smells pretty bad, and sometimes he doesn’t make much sense.*

The “feeding” team will (hopefully) hit their buzzer.

The “welcoming the stranger” group and the “visiting the sick” group may also respond. Ask all of the teams to discuss the best things to do for Harry. Encourage interaction between teams. For instance, the “visiting the sick” group may say he has to have treatment for substance abuse before anyone else can help him very much. Others may disagree.

Repeat the above treatment for the following stories:

*Martha is serving time in the county jail. She has been selling crack in her neighborhood. Her two children—Crystal, age eight, and James, age six—are with their grandmother. Martha hasn’t heard from the children’s father since Jerome was born. She couldn’t find a job, and she got hooked on crack when a friend gave her some. She began selling it to support her habit, and to also help her mother support the children. Now she has gone through rehabilitation; she’s clean, and she wants to go home and start over.*

*Felicia is Colombian. She came to the United States to get away from*

*the violence in her country, and she is here illegally. She lives in a run-down apartment house in Houston and lives in fear that the immigration authorities will find her and send her back to Colombia. She is certain that, if she goes back, she will be tortured and killed. She can’t work, because she doesn’t have a green card.*

*Jack is HIV-positive. He lives in Los Angeles, and he is too weak now to hold a job. He is afraid that he will lose his apartment, and he doesn’t have enough strength to cook.*

By this time, all teams should have had a chance to respond. Remind the students that Jesus said each of these people in the stories represents him. Ask them if thinking in this way makes them want to respond any differently than they have before.

—Katie Cook is editor for Seeds of Hope Publishers. These activities are loosely adapted from “Hunger in My World,” a unit of Sunday school lessons she wrote for the Smyth & Helwys youth curriculum series, *Intersection*. (For more information about the *Intersection* series, contact Smyth & Helwys Publishers, 1400 Coleman Avenue; Macon, GA 31207.)

## What Jesus Didn't Say

### A Reading for Youth and Others

by Katie Cook

FIRST READER: Jesus didn’t say to Peter, “Do you love me? Then go out and build magnificent structures with arches and columns and gold-leaf frescoes.”  
ALL: He said, “Feed my sheep.”

SECOND READER: He didn’t say, “Go and organize institutions in which the leaders will have more power and wealth than anyone else on earth.”  
ALL: He said, “Feed my sheep.”

THIRD READER: He didn’t say, “Take the things I’ve said and done and put them in a book that you will raise up as an object of worship.”  
ALL: He said, “Feed my sheep.”

FIRST READER: He didn’t say, “Put my words in red ink and then do everything you can to forget them or discount them.”  
ALL: He said, “Feed my sheep.”

SECOND READER: He didn’t say, “Work out a system of belief whereby to exclude and punish anyone who disagrees with you.”  
ALL: He said, “Feed my sheep.”

THIRD READER: He didn’t say, “Become as prosperous as you can, dress as sumptuously as you can and show how you are blessed by your possessions.”  
ALL: He said, “Feed my sheep.”  
And then he said, “Follow me.”

—based on John 21



# Lillian vs. The Galactic Space Mages of Doom

## Or Hearing the Cries of the Poor and Oppressed

(A Skit for 5-9 Youth)

by Rachel C. Hunter

**NARRATOR 1:** Lillian arrives home after a weary day's work at the Big-Mart. All day she shelves plastic toys and helps customers. Picking up the toys and putting them on shelves. Over and over and over again.

**NARRATOR 2:** Another day she has gone without breakfast or lunch so that she can save food and money for her daughter. She is worried about the electricity bill, it's higher than usual and she doesn't know how she's going to pay for it.

**NARRATOR 1:** Her eyes ache. When she closes her eyes she can see the reflective glare of the light on plastic packaging. Her arms and shoulders ache from performing the same repetitive motion over and over and over again.

**NARRATOR 2:** Her daughter greets her affectionately:

**DAUGHTER:** Hi mom; why are you so late?

**LILLIAN:** The store was really busy today and I didn't get a chance to stock the shelves. The boss said we don't get overtime pay if we haven't finished our work.

**DAUGHTER:** But you were helping customers; how could you stock shelves? How can he do that?

**LILLIAN:** We're supposed to be able to do both, so they don't

budget for overtime. Besides, if I don't show that I'm loyal to the company I might be the first to be laid off.

**DAUGHTER:** (*Thinks a moment*) Oh. I'm sorry.

**LILLIAN:** Thanks, sweetie. How was your day?

**DAUGHTER:** (*Suddenly excited*) I just saw a commercial for Sci-Fi Mage. Have you seen the new galactic wizards with Zap-o-ramma eyes?

**LILLIAN:** I see the package for them all day.

**DAUGHTER:** Really? Do you think you can get me one?

**LILLIAN:** I'm really sorry, but they're very expensive and, even with my employee discount, we just can't afford one right now.

**DAUGHTER:** That's okay. I guess I don't really want one anyway. (*They hug.*)

**NARRATOR 3:** Then you shall call and the Lord will answer; you shall cry for help and the Lord will say, "Here I am." [Isaiah 58:9]

**NARRATOR 1:** Meanwhile, that same evening, Bradford, the regional manager of Big-Mart, is attending a charity function to benefit the needy. He has spent all day crunching numbers so that he can achieve the maximum profit for his company.



art by Curtis Cannon

**NARRATOR 2:** ...And the maximum salary for himself, of course. He makes 200 times the amount that Lillian makes.

**NARRATOR 1:** His wrist and shoulders ache from all the writing and typing, but his massage therapist is extremely good, and he sees her daily.

**NARRATOR 2:** Bradford rushes into the scarlet-carpeted ballroom with the glare of crystal chandeliers in his eyes. He greets his friend Buffy, who is also the hostess.

**BUFFY:** Bradford, fashionably late as always.

**BRADFORD:** Yes; you wouldn't believe the day I had. Our profits aren't rising by the predicted amount, and I had to convince my local managers that they aren't budgeted for all this overtime pay—convince workers to stay late to show their commitment to the company.

**BUFFY:** Oh, you sneaky thing you. You are a brilliant business person.

**BRADFORD:** Well it's all in a day's work. So let's talk about you. This is a fabulous event. The decorations are gorgeous, but where is the food?

**BUFFY:** Darling, it's a banquet fast, to raise awareness for the hungry.

**BRADFORD:** Oh, how bohemian.

**BUFFY:** No it's a biblical thing, all the rave.

**BRADFORD:** Well, I could stand to lose some weight. Everyone wins! And I feel so good about doing it... [*Buffy and Bradford freeze*]

**NARRATOR 3:** Yet, day after day they seek me and delight to know my ways, as if they were a nation that practiced righteousness and did not forsake the ordinance of their God; they ask of me righteous judgments. They delight to draw near to God.

[*Actors who play Bradford and Buffy unfreeze and become the voices*]

**VOICES:** God, why do we fast, but you do not see? Why do we humble ourselves, but you do not notice?

**NARRATOR 3:** Look, you serve your own interest on your fast day, and oppress all your workers. [*Isaiah 58: 2: 3 (NRSV)*]

**NARRATOR 1:** Ray and his Dad are at the downtown shopping plaza. Ray is excited about the birthday money his Aunt Katie sent him.

**NARRATOR 2:** Ray and his dad come upon the newly remodeled Super-Duper Deluxe Big-Mart. Ray's eyes sparkle from the array of toys displayed tantalizingly in the window.

**RAY:** Look, Dad! It's the new Sci-Fi Galactic Mage Flesh-Eating Alien, complete with realistic slime. Dad, that's what I want for my birthday. Can I get it? Can I? Can I? Can I?

**Dad:** Well, I promised myself I wouldn't shop here anymore.

**RAY:** But Big-Mart is the only place in town that sells Sci-Fi Galactic Mages. Ever since Terri's Toys closed down.

**DAD:** That used to be in this same shopping center, didn't it? Terri's was a local business and probably couldn't compete with the low prices.

**RAY:** You say that like it's a bad thing!

**DAD:** Ray, listen to me. We all want to buy things more cheaply, but some stores make their prices cheaper, by not giving the people who work there enough money, or by working them longer hours, or laying them off before they receive job benefits. Big-Mart does a lot of these things and more. Do you understand?

**RAY:** I do, but I really want the Sci-Fi Mage. Lots of kids in school have them and—

**DAD:** Well, it's your money and your decision. You have to make a choice...

**NARRATOR 1:** Is not this the fast that I choose: to loose the bonds of injustice, to undo the thongs of the yoke, to let the oppressed go free and to break every yoke? Is it not to share your bread with the hungry, and bring the homeless and poor into your house; when you see the naked to cover them, and not to hide yourself from your own kin?

**NARRATOR 2:** Then your light shall break forth like the dawn, and your healing shall spring up quickly; your vindicator shall go before you, and the glory of the Lord shall be your rear guard.

**NARRATOR 1:** Then you shall call and the Lord will answer. You shall cry for help and the Lord will say,

**NARRATOR 3:** Here I am. [*Isaiah 58: 6: 9 (NRSV)*]

—Rae Hunter, at this writing, taught theatre and writing at The Meeting School in Rindge, New Hampshire. The last we heard about her whereabouts, she was teaching in Ecuador. From Sacred Seasons, Hunger Emphasis 2005, "You Have Heard the Cries of the Poor."

# How He Broke the Bread

## A Reading for Youth and Others

by Katie Cook

FIRST READER: Who was this man from Galilee? Was he the one? Several times people asked him that. “How do we know you’re really the one?”

SECOND READER: Yes; how do we recognize him?

THIRD READER: I don’t know; there was just something different about him. You knew somehow that he was set apart, and you wanted to be around him as much as you could.

FOURTH READER: There were lots of people who followed him around, listening to him and watching him, and trying to get close to him.

FIRST READER: Somebody said it was the way the dust motes danced around his feet when he walked.<sup>1</sup>

THIRD READER: Somebody said it was the way he talked, the way he touched people.

FOURTH READER: But I think it was the fact that he was so...real. He was so real that he seemed, well, it’s hard to describe what I mean. So real he was, I don’t know, holy or something.

SECOND READER: I think I know what you mean. Like when he went to people’s houses and ate with them, and laughed and told stories. And yet they came away changed forever.

THIRD READER: Even Zacchaeus; do you remember that? That little weasel. I couldn’t believe it! Jesus went to his house and had supper with him.

FOURTH READER: And then Zacchaeus gave everything away. All of that money he had hoarded all those years.

SECOND READER: A lot of people did that when they got to know Jesus.

THIRD READER: The time I remember, though, is when Jesus is sitting beside the lake late one night, making breakfast for the gang.

FIRST READER: The Light of the World getting a fire going for breakfast by sheltering a spark with a pair of cupped hands and blowing on it.<sup>2</sup>

FOURTH READER: We knew him in the everyday, ordinary—and yet somehow extraordinary, and maybe even cosmological—act of sharing food.

THIRD READER: Yes! Do you remember when Cleopas and his friend were walking to Emmaus? It was after Jesus was executed, and

then there were stories about people seeing him alive. They were walking along, and this stranger showed up out of nowhere and walked with them.

SECOND READER: Yeah; can you imagine? It was their leader, and they didn’t even recognize him!

FOURTH READER: Not until they talked him into staying for supper. There was something about that, the way he broke the bread.

FIRST READER: That’s what they said; it was the way he broke the bread.

SECOND READER: Maybe they were onto something. Maybe that’s how we recognize him.

THIRD READER: Maybe that’s how we know each other. In the breaking of the bread.

FIRST READER: The sacred in the ordinary. The sharing of food.

ALL READERS: (pensively, thoughtfully) The sharing of food...

—Katie Cook is the *Seeds of Hope* editor. From *Sacred Seasons, Hunger Emphasis* 2002, “In the Breaking of the Bread”

Notes:

1. This is from Canadian musician/poet Bruce Cockburn’s “Creation Dream,” a song on the album *Dancing in the Dragon’s Jaw*.
2. This is from the monograph on *Darkness in Whistling in the Dark* by Frederick Buechner.



art by Sallylynn Askins

# Bread, Rest and Strength for the Journey

## A Youth-led Communion Service for a Weary Congregation

by Katie Cook and John Garland

**N**ote: This service is designed to be led by youth, but it could actually be led by any group within the congregation. You will need baskets or trays (preferably of wicker or wood), different kinds of bread (for instance, baguettes, tortillas, pita, round sourdough loaves, or pumpernickel—but you need to make sure it is all easy to tear into pieces), and bunches of red grapes.

At one point in the service, your leaders will ask the congregants to form two lines facing each other (perhaps down the aisles of the sanctuary). If you have a large group, you may want to have two or more sets of these lines. Your worship leaders will send the trays down from both ends of these lines, so you will need two baskets or trays per set of lines. Get the youth to arrange an assortment of breads with grapes on each basket or tray.

You will need six readers for readings, a reading chorus (with a leader) and a person for both the invocation and benediction. (The youth may prefer to voice their own prayers. Please encourage them to do so if this is the case.)

We have suggested hymns here, but please feel free to be creative and improvise according to your congregation's personality and needs. Your youth might be also interested in adding their own touches with homemade banners, interpretive dance or their own choices for music. They might want to insert some kind of special music in the form of a solo or choral anthem. You also may prefer to use other translations of the scriptures. The scriptures below are based on the New Revised Standard Version.

### Invocation

God, you are our Creator, who shaped the earth and all its creatures, who invented the wheat and the corn, the rice and the grape. You are the source of our life, the one who nurtures us as if we were small children. We are thirsty and hungry, without resources, and we are exhausted. We call unto you today because, as usual, we have pushed ourselves to the limit. We have tried to accomplish things on our own. We need your nourishment. We

need your comfort. We need to gain strength from being with you. Come to us, come into our midst. Feed us.

### Reading

I Kings 19:1-8

Ahab told Jezebel all that Elijah had done and how he had killed all the prophets with the sword. Then Jezebel sent a messenger to Elijah, saying, "So may the gods do to me, and more also, if I do not make your life like the life of one of them by this time tomorrow." Then he was afraid; he got up and fled for his life, and came to Beer-sheba, which belongs to Judah; he left his servant there. But he himself went a day's journey into the wilderness, and came and sat down under a solitary broom tree. He asked that he might die: "It is enough; now, O Lord, take away my life, for I am no better than my ancestors." Then he lay down under the broom tree and fell asleep. Suddenly an angel touched him and said to him, "Get up and eat." He looked, and there at his head was a cake baked on hot stones, and a jar of water. He ate and drank, and lay down again. The angel of the Lord came a second time, touched him, and said, "Get up and eat, otherwise the journey will be too much for you." He got up, and ate and drank; then



art by Rebecca S. Ward



he went in the strength of that food forty days and forty nights to Horeb the mount of God.

### Hymn

“Help Us Accept Each Other”

—particularly the last verse:

Lord, for today’s encounters  
with all who are in need,  
who hunger for acceptance,  
for righteousness and bread,  
we need new eyes for seeing,  
new hands for holding on,  
renew us with your spirit, Lord,  
free us, make us one!

(words: Fred Kaan, 1975; music: John Ness Beck, 1977,  
hymn # 437, *The Worshiping Church*, Hope Publishing  
Company)

### Reading: Isaiah 55:1-3a

Ho, everyone who thirsts, come to the waters;  
And you that have no money, come, buy and eat!  
Come, buy wine and milk without money  
and without price.

Why do you spend your money for that which is not bread,  
and your labor for that which does not satisfy?

Listen carefully to me, and eat what is good,  
and delight yourselves in rich food.

Incline your ear, and come to me;  
listen, so that you may live.

*Note: At this point, instruct the worship leaders to help the congregation to form into facing lines. Don’t tell the congregation yet what is in store. (You might want to have someone playing guitar or organ while the lines are forming. Songs like “Let Us Break Bread Together” or “In Remembrance of Me” would be appropriate here.)*

*After the lines are formed, instruct one of the worship leaders to explain that bread and grapes will be coming down the lines, and that each congregant is asked not to feed himself/herself, but to feed the person across the aisle. Each person should tear off a piece of bread and feed it to his/her partner, and then tear off a grape and do the same. As he/she does this, he/she could say, “Bread for the journey. May the Peace of Christ go with you.”*

*As the congregants are doing this, the reading chorus should begin:*

### Choral Reading

LEADER: Come, every one of you who is thirsty,

CHORUS: Come to the waters.

LEADER: And all of you who are hungry and have no money for food,

CHORUS: Come on! You can buy all the food you need!

LEADER: The angel said to Elijah,

CHORUS: “Get up and eat! Get up and eat, or the journey will be too much for you.”

LEADER: Jesus said,

CHORUS: “Eat and remember who I am, so that you will remember who you are.”

*Note: The following readings are also for reading while the people partake of the food. We suggest that you assign them to the reading chorus, since they will already be in place.*

FIRST READER: The Lord spoke to Moses and said, “I have heard the complaining of the Israelites; say to them, ‘At twilight you shall eat meat, and in the morning you shall have your fill of bread.’” (Exodus 16:11-12a)

SECOND READER: Seek the Lord while God may be found. Call upon God while God is near; let the wicked forsake their way, and the unrighteous their thoughts; let them return to the Lord, that the Lord may have mercy on them, and to our God, for God will abundantly pardon. “For my thoughts are not your thoughts, nor are your ways my ways,” says the Lord. “For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts.” (Isaiah 55:6-9)

THIRD READER: Then Jesus took a loaf of bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it and gave it to them, saying, “This is my body, which is given for you. Do this in remembrance of me.” And he did the same with the cup after supper, saying, “This cup that is poured out for you is the new covenant in my blood.” (Luke 22:19-20)

*Note: At this point, ask the people to be seated again.*

### Hymn

“Lord, Whose Love in Humble Service”

—particularly the first two verses:

Lord, whose love is humble service  
bore the weight of human need,  
who upon the cross, forsaken,  
worked your mercy’s perfect deed:  
we, your servants, bring the worship  
not of voice alone, but heart,  
consecrating to your purpose,  
every gift which you impart.

Still your children wander homeless,

still the hungry cry for bread;

still the captives long for freedom,

still in grief we mourn our dead.

As you, Lord, in deep compassion

healed the sick and freed the soul,  
By your Spirit send your power  
to our world to make it whole.

(words: Albert F. Bayly, 1961; suggested tune: *Beach Spring*, hymn # 426, *The Worshiping Church*, Hope Publishing Company.)

*Note: Ask the congregation to stand (if able) at this point.*

### **Benedictory Petition**

Holy God, Feed us with the bread we need for this day. Infuse us with the strength and passion for the days to come. Walk with us, sing your song into our hearts, stay with us to the end of the journey. For we cannot make it without you. Amen.

### **Benedictory Reading**

Isaiah 55:10-13


For as the rain and the snow come down from heaven,  
and do not return there  
until they have watered the earth,

making it bring forth and sprout,  
giving seed to the sower and bread to the eater,  
so shall my word be that goes out from my mouth;  
it shall not return to me empty,  
but it shall accomplish that which I purpose,  
and succeed in the thing for which I sent it.  
For you shall go out in joy, and be led back in peace;  
the mountains and the hills before you  
shall burst into song,  
and all the trees of the field shall clap their hands.  
Instead of the thorn shall come up the cypress;  
instead of the brier shall come up the myrtle;  
and it shall be to the Lord for a memorial,  
for an everlasting sign that shall not be cut off.

—John Garland is a Mennonite pastor and agricultural organizer in San Juan, Texas, near the Mexico border. Katie Cook is the *Seeds of Hope* editor. From *Sacred Seasons, Hunger Emphasis 2000*, “There Was No One Needy Among Them.”

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*art by Sharon R. Rollins*