

# 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*

**Seeds of Hope Publishers**

**Hope Is in Our Hands: Lessons & Activities about Hunger for Children & Youth**