

# Feeding the five thousand

## On your marks:

Many children's leaders have found the style of storytelling that has been developed within Godly Play to be a very helpful and effective way of opening up the Bible with children. In the *Barnabas* Ministry Team we have been experimenting with some additional stories from scripture presented in this style, which we have used at *Barnabas* events and on Quiet Days. We are making them available so you can try them out with your children's group and we would be interested in any feedback on how they were received. Remember to tell the story slowly, focusing on the objects and on the story itself, **not** on the children who are listening. When you have finished telling the story, leave a short space and then use the wondering questions written out for you at the end of the piece.

## Get set:

The story of the feeding of the 5,000 is the only miracle to be recorded by all four Gospel writers. You can read it in: Matthew 14:13-21; Mark 6: 30-44; Luke 9:10-17; and John 6:1-14. Of these, it is John's account that makes mention of the young boy being willing to part with his basket of food and this is a particular focus in this retelling. John also has chosen this event as one of his 'seven signs'. These are particular miracles that have something very special to say to the reader about who Jesus is (see John 20: 30-31). There is certainly a lot to wonder about from this story, which is why there are additional 'wondering questions' you might like to use with your group.

For this presentation you will need the following items, choosing or making 3-D objects that are both simple and attractive:

- a large beige base cloth, about A2 in size;
- a small wavy-edged piece of blue felt that can overlay one corner;
- 7 small circles of green felt to be grassy areas;
- some stones;
- a wooden boat;
- a set of 7 wooden figures for the disciples and one figure to represent Christ;
- a smaller child-sized wooden figure;
- 12 very small, wooden bucket-like containers filled with semolina to represent bread crumbs;
- two small wooden fish and 5 wooden circles to represent the barley loaves;
- 7 sets of 5 or 6 small gingerbread figures glued onto strips of balsa wood (for speed of moving and ease of placement) to represent the crowds.

Gingerbread people and some of the other wooden items, including the bucket-like containers are available in packets from the chain store *Hobbycraft*.

## **Go!**

**1**

*As you say the following words, lay out the beige cloth carefully and then place the piece of blue felt in the corner where the boat will land. This should be close to the children. Also place on the cloth the stones and the green grass areas randomly across the base cloth, but leave the area close to the shore empty, as this is where the disciples will gather with Jesus and the main action takes place.*

This is a lonely place. It is by the sea. It is lonely and deserted.  
There are places that are very beautiful and picturesque;  
And there are some places that are very bleak and empty.  
Some places are obviously beautiful but there are others can be beautiful in a different way.  
Lonely, bleak places can be beautiful.  
And some lonely places become special because of what happens there.  
This is a lonely place.

**2**

*Put down the boat, half on the water and half on the shore. Place the disciples and Jesus in a semi-circle in front, on the dry land facing the storyteller.*

Jesus and his disciples arrived here by boat. It was important that it was a lonely place. Jesus had suggested going there. They needed a rest and a place to be quiet. The disciples had been very busy, perhaps too busy and now they needed space to be alone.  
Jesus also needed space. Space and time to mourn, because he was sad.  
The news of how cousin John had been executed in prison had just reached him.  
Jesus needed time to think, to remember and to be sad.  
So they came to this lonely place together.

**3**

*Begin slowly to place the sets of people around the scene near to the grassy areas and the rocks. They should arrive across land from the side nearest the children. The crowds should be turned towards Jesus.*

But the crowds from the towns and villages were so needy and so desperate. They had come running to find Jesus in the lonely place. They needed to hear him, to see him and come close to him. They needed a place to bring their loneliness. And so they came in their hundreds.... in their thousands to this lonely place and filled it up with their own emptiness.

When Jesus saw the crowds he felt their sadness. He knew how they felt. He understood their loneliness. They were like sheep without a shepherd. And so Jesus spoke to them about the Kingdom of God; about the way things can be when God is in control.

And the people listened. The disciples listened. They listened all day to his teaching and to his stories. They listened until it was already late in the afternoon.

*Hold your hand as the storyteller near to the person who is speaking*

His disciples were growing hungry and the crowd too needed to eat. 'It's time to finish,' suggested Philip. 'Send the crowd off to buy food for their journey home, before it's too late'. 'Why don't you give them some food?' asked Jesus. 'You would need a year's wages to feed this number,' replied Philip. 'It's just not possible.'

**4**

*Bring on the small child figure and place him next to the disciple who is Andrew.*

Just then Andrew spoke up. 'There's a child here with some food. Five barley loaves and two small fish. It's all we have but it won't feed this crowd.'

**5**

*Lay down the five loaves and two fish in front of Jesus. Move the child next to Jesus.*

Jesus told the people to sit down in large family and friendship groups. There were some grassy areas in this lonely place and so that's where they arranged themselves in fifties and hundreds.

The disciples watched and wondered. Jesus knew what he would do. The crowds watched and wondered. The child watched and wondered too.

**6**

*Lift up one of the loaves as you say the following words.*

Jesus took the loaves, looked up to heaven, blessed the bread, broke it and gave it to his disciples.

**7**

*Move one disciple out at a time to each of the groups that represent the crowds, taking with him one loaf or one fish. Once all seven disciples have arrived with a section of the crowd, this loaf or fish should then be concealed in your hand and quietly returned to a basket out of view.*

The disciples took it out to the crowds. Each time they returned there was more for them to distribute. They did the same with the fish. And everyone had enough to eat.

**8**

*After a pause, bring back each disciple to the semi-circle by Jesus and place in front of him one or two of the baskets of leftovers, until all 12 are resting in front of them with Jesus and the child still as the focus of the semi-circle.*

After they'd finished, the disciples went out to pick up the leftovers. Between them the disciples brought back 12 baskets full of broken pieces.

In that lonely place the crowds were amazed and began to say that this must be the prophet that they'd been told to expect.

In that lonely place the disciples were amazed and began to puzzle over what it all meant.

In that lonely place the child wondered at the miracle that happened with the five loaves

and two small fish.

*I wonder what you like best about this story?*

*I wonder what is most important in this story?*

*I wonder where you are in this story or which part of the story is especially about you?*

*I wonder whether you've ever arrived at a lonely place like this?*

*I wonder whether you've ever been so busy you needed a break but then that break was taken from you?*

*I wonder whether you've ever needed space to be sad?*

*I wonder why Andrew noticed that child with the packed lunch?*

*I wonder why he thought to mention it to Jesus?*

*I wonder why the child was willing to hand it over to Jesus?*

*I wonder why Jesus didn't just tell them all to go home?*

*I wonder why Jesus made them sit down in groups?*

*I wonder whether the child was happy that he or she had given up the loaves and fish to Jesus?*

*I wonder what the child said later to friends?*

*I wonder what the disciples were feeling as they collected up the leftovers?*

*I wonder what the crowds thought had really happened?*

*I wonder if this miracle is also a parable?*

*I wonder why all the stories of Jesus include this miracle?*

*I wonder what Jesus' was hoping they would understand from what had happened?*

*I wonder why it's so important a miracle that we need to hear it about today?*

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