



Feeding the Children in Your Meeting

can we still expect miracles?

from Chris Jorgenson

Matthew 14: 13-21

Then the crowds heard of his departure and followed him [Jesus] out of the towns on foot. When Jesus emerged from his retreat, he saw a vast crowd and was very deeply moved, and cured the sick among them. As evening fell his disciples came to him and said "We are right in the wilds here and it is very late. Send away these crowds now, so that they can go into the villages and buy themselves food."

"There's no need for them to go away," returned Jesus. "You give them something to eat!"

"But we haven't anything here," they told him, "except five loaves and two fish." To which Jesus replies, "Bring them here to me."

He told the crowd to sit down on the grass. Then he took the five loaves and the two fish in his hands, and, looking up to Heaven, he thanked God, broke the loaves and passed them to his disciples who handed them to the crowd.

Everyone ate and was satisfied. Afterward they collected twelve baskets full of the pieces which were left over. Those who ate numbered about five thousand men, apart from the women and children.

- Jesus, excuse me, but I wonder if I could trouble you a minute – if you don't mind being interrupted from your teaching
- Hey, no problem, I'm always available. What's up?
- Well, Jesus, it's these families that have started to come to our meeting. They're talking about religious education for their children and we're just not up to it. I wonder if you could suggest some Sunday School we could send them to, not too far off Friends' principles, but make sure they come back to us when they don't have these needs, you know what I mean?
- Hmmm. Tell me first: who are the children?
- Oh, it varies. From two to fifteen years old. Great kids, but sporadic attenders. All different personalities . . . it's an impossible task, don't you agree?
- Well, hold on a minute. Tell me about the meeting, too.
- Oh, jeeze (whoops,sorry), I mean, that's what's REALLY impossible. I just can't see any educational potential in our meeting. A couple of peace and social concerns types who think silent vigils are the ultimate religious experience for any age. A couple of Christians, or maybe it's just that they preach too much, they'd be way too crabby with the kids. Some neo-pagans who would probably just leave the kids in the woods. A few elderly who had to teach their own children when they were young and aren't about to do it again. And then there's the parents, who are just yearning for an hour of quiet, but they're afraid we'll send them out with their own kids Why don't we have some of those educator types that other meetings seem to have? Selfless, Quaker to the core, endlessly creative on a shoestring budget, engaging, charismatic, able to walk on Juicy Juice . . .Where are they?
- Um, y'know, I gave you the people you need. I suggest you get them together to pray and think about the children, and then listen for my instructions
- Hey, wait a minute, Lord. Do you think this is the 50's or something? (The 1950's I'm referring to, not the 0050's!)

Well, this is the year 2000! Everyone works!! No one has time!! No one can agree on what to teach!!! (in fact, I feel a little conspicuous calling you Lord – can we just go on first name basis from now on?) And the kids!!! Kids don't want to learn, they hate school and anything like school!!! They just want to play organized sports and Nintendo games!!

- Are you done?
- NO!! I'm just tired of beating my head against a brick wall, okay?
- Let me hear this correctly. You're telling me that you've suffered too much? Maybe you've been abandoned by your friends over this? Had to give up home and security in order to be free to teach? Gotten into trouble with the authorities about this subversive teaching you've been spreading?
- What are you getting at? I'm just talking about Quakerism, you know. You're overreacting. Maybe you're getting your own issues mixed up in this.
- Sorry. I guess you're right. Sounds to me like what you're really looking for is some Quakerism software and the donation of a few computers to the meeting?
- Jesus!! (No, really, I mean it this time.) Incredible idea!! They don't call you Son of Man for nothing!

continued next page.

So where are we? In the wilds.

What have we got? Not much, a few loaves and fishes. What do we face? A great hunger.

What can we do? First we suggest to God that it's an impossible task, whereupon God tells us that we have what it takes. How can that be?

The principles that I see in Matthew's story did not require that the Gifted and Talented be among the disciples. Rather, they were people who recognized the needs around them. And they knew where to turn – to God. They listened (even while protesting!) When given instructions, they obeyed, they made themselves available. Here we see the importance of faith (trust) over belief. Frankly, they didn't quite believe that this would work – they doubted – but they went ahead anyway in trust.

So have we tried those steps? For instance, have we listened, really listened, for the message for us? What if it's that the adults need to be prepared and active in their own religious development in order for the children to be taught? Are we willing to hear and act on that? Do we show in our own lives interest in what we wish to teach?

Some people say that the miracle of this story was sharing, that people in the crowd actually gave of their own food in order to create the abundance and surplus. What sparked that sharing? The willingness, the trust, the faith of the disciples. That's the sharing we need in our meetings.

By the way, I don't really believe that we expect our First Day School problems to be solved by Quakerism software. (a Quaker video, maybe....) I don't doubt the difficulty of the situations people face in their meeting – it really IS tough. I don't have easy answers. I do believe that we have more to rely upon than the sum of our talents. It is an enterprise of God, who will be our support and supplier of what we need. It is such an important task, guiding our children into a life with God. And as we work at this, we find our own lives guided as well.

Cool.

Matthew 7:7-11

Ask and keep asking, and you will receive. Seek and keep seeking, and you will find. Knock and keep knocking, and the door will be opened to you. For the one who keeps asking, receives. The one who keeps seeking finds. And the one who keeps knocking, enters.

Is there any among you who would hand your daughter a stone when she asked for bread? Would one of you hand your son a snake when he asked for a fish? If you, with all your faults, know how to give your children what is good, how much more will your Abba God in heaven give good things to those who ask!

from the Inclusive New Testament



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