

## Poverty of voice

### Reflection by Jim Davis

I have often wondered about the story found in all the gospels of the sharing of five loaves and two fish so that thousands could be fed by Jesus. The Synoptic Gospels make no mention of the provider of the food. Only John's account mentions the boy. Did he offer up his lunch so that Jesus could perform a miracle, or did some burly disciple take command of his lunch on his behalf? Was he a willing participant in a marvellous miracle that is recorded in all four gospels, or was he left bemused and overruled by a mass of adults making decisions without his voice being heard? In truth, we don't know. If this boy did make any comment about the situation it is not recorded and perhaps this is another example of how children's voices are ignored or not listened to. How often it is that the small voices of children are left out, not recorded or included in the big adult debates and decisions?

What might be the significance of the Synoptics' lack of mention of the food provider? Except, why is there a mention of this child anywhere at all? Why does it matter that these small barley loaves and fish belonged to a small boy?

It matters because amongst the thousands of people gathered to listen to Jesus, amongst the fathers and mothers, the disciples, the followers, the important people and the well-prepared with food in their bags, it was a young child who makes the significant contribution. It was a small boy who gave what was needed so that something spectacular and significant could happen. His contribution made the difference, and all of those thousands of people would have been the poorer, and the hungrier, if he had not. If he had clutched his lunch to his chest, if he had stuffed it deep into his bag, or quickly taken a bite out of every loaf, then thousands would have gone hungry. I was once a small boy in a large family, and I know how to hang on to food, yet, I am sure this boy gave his contribution freely and with a result that touched many.

We sometimes confuse giving children their voice with set occasions, with prepared events and methods that allow children to say something that we have decided, is significant. Those occasions are important, they do matter. But they are no substitute for a willingness and a constant desire to accept the contribution of children, even when we haven't asked for it. If we fail to be open to that contribution then we are all the poorer for it.

## Discussion questions

You will need: a bread roll

Pass the roll around the group. Invite people to break a small piece off and pass the roll around. How many people might share from the one roll?

### **The Church of England Child Friendly Church Award, section 7**

Children and young people are seen as equal members of the church community.

- Are you seeking to promote an all-age culture in church, ie do you try and find ways to do all church activities in multi-generational groups?
- Do you invite your 16+ to contribute to your Church Council meetings and encourage them to be Council members?
- Are children and young people involved in the leading of services?
- Are children and young people involved in planning for worship and their group activities?
- Are they listened to / consulted on a range of church matters?
- Are they invited to be involved in the day to day running of the church?
- Do they have an input to the parish magazine or other parish publications?

*The Child Friendly Church Award invites Anglican congregations to consider the place of children in their community. The principles can apply to all church communities.*

- How well does your church fare?
- Who are the children you are most likely to hear from in your church?
- What barriers do you think there might be that make it more difficult for children in poverty to have their voice heard?

*In the Bible reading of the feeding of the 5,000, the young boy is able to provide for the whole community. His contribution is vital.*

- How might children and young people be enabled to contribute to the life of your community?
- How might your community be worse off without input from children and young people?

*'We spend too much time listening to children and not enough to those adults who know better.'*

- Do you think it matters that adults speak on behalf of children?
- How might you provide space for children to speak out for what they need?

# Worship materials

*Based on John 6.1-14.*

## A collect-style prayer

Lord Jesus, man of Galilee,  
who heard the cry of the hungry  
and received the gift of a child,  
open our eyes to the needs of your children  
and our hearts to respond,  
so that the abundant gifts of the earth  
may be shared more fairly  
and all may marvel at your wonderful deeds.

**Amen.**

## Intercessions

Lord Jesus, we come to you in intercession, asking you for things.

**But we forget that you too have questions to put to us.**

Lord Jesus, we come to you to tell you things you already know, and needs we have.

**We neglect to tell you the one thing you are waiting to hear, which is 'How will I respond?'**

Lord Jesus, we dismiss the poor offerings that we can make,  
but this child made an offering that changed the whole world.

**Help us to respond in confidence and faith.**

Lord Jesus, you commanded the people to sit down.

**May we hear your call to us, to sit in your presence and wait for you to reveal your love.**

Lord Jesus, you took the generosity of a child and made a banquet for thousands.

**May we treasure and nurture the gifts of all your children.**

**Amen.**

## Prayer starters

Place five small bread rolls on a tray or table. Invite people to take and share bread as they pray for:

- silenced individuals
- silenced groups
- those who feel they are ignored
- The Children's Society projects with those who are not listened to
- those who suffer because they have spoken out: political activists, whistle blowers and so on.

## **Active prayer**

Invite someone to read John 6.1-14 keep silence together for three minutes, inviting each person, in the quiet, to listen for the voices coming from the story. Then invite people to share the words of the voices that they heard. You could do this by inviting everyone to write them down and placing them on the floor or a table, or people could simply say what they heard and they could be written up for all to see.

Invite everyone to choose one sentence or saying on which to comment. Does it puzzle them or inspire them? Is it something they can act on, or is it something they think is silly or unhelpful? Make clear that all reflections are welcome.

Then invite people to take some words away with them to think about through the week.

## **Music suggestions to suit a variety of traditions**

Dance on injustice  
Do not be afraid  
Hear my prayer O God  
Make me a channel of your peace  
Seek ye first  
Take, O take me as I am  
The greatness of the small  
There's a spirit in the air

## What can you do?

- [The Children's Commission on Poverty](#) has brought children together to examine children's experiences of living in poverty. [Sign up for updates](#) and [join us in praying](#) to see poverty through young eyes.
- Three million families are likely to cut back on food so they can pay their energy bills this winter. [Email your MP](#) and ask the government to ensure no child's health suffers because of a cold home.

## Keep in touch

- [Sign up to our monthly prayer email](#) to join us in prayer for children and young people.
- Follow us on Twitter on [@ChildSocChurch](#).