

## 1. The crowds follow Jesus

We're going to be thinking about a story today in which Jesus is surrounded by a great crowd. This often happened: the people loved to hear his teaching and they longed for him to heal them, as he had healed so many others. Our story starts with Jesus going off in a boat across the lake, to be on his own. But the crowds found out where he had gone, and they followed him on foot from all the towns in the area.

So we thought we might start today by playing some *following* games.

E.g.

DO THIS DO THAT: Players copy the leader's actions if s/he says 'Do this' but not if s/he says 'Do that' (like 'Simon Says').

ACTION NAMES (*split into two circles if necessary*): The first player does an action (e.g. clap, jump, wave) while saying his/her own name; everyone copies the action and repeats the name; the next player does a different action with his/her name; everyone says the first player's name with his/her action, then the second player's; and so on until the whole circle has had a turn.

## 2. Jesus heals

So the crowds followed Jesus - and when Jesus landed and saw them all, he felt sorry for them and healed all who were ill.

When we were planning this afternoon, we thought a bit about what healing means. It means that Jesus made the sick people better: he put them back to how they were meant to be. Sometimes healing is

described as ‘making us whole again’: putting all the pieces back in the right places.

Over here we have some picnic baskets, and they’re meant to be full of lovely picnics, but unfortunately the picnic things are all in the wrong place. So we need your help to put them back in the right places - to make the picnic whole again.

PICNIC PACKER RELAY GAME: Teams line up behind a pile of plastic foods (or pictures of food), with a basket for each team at the other end of the hall; the front players pick up a food and runs to put it in the basket, then runs back and tags the next player before going to the back of the line; the next player takes the next food; etc. until all the foods are in the basket and the team back in line.

### **3. The disciples panic**

So the crowds have followed Jesus, and he’s healed the sick ones, and now it’s getting late. Jesus’ disciples think it’s time to wrap things up. They come to him and say, “We’re in the middle of nowhere and it’s getting really late. You’d better send all the crowds away so that they can go to the villages and buy themselves some food.”

We thought perhaps we wouldn’t send you all away at this point! But maybe there’s something else we can send away.

*We used a play parachute at this point. Blowing bubbles would work, too.*

PARACHUTE: MUSHROOM - NB beware height differences

PARACHUTE: LET GO & FLOAT

#### **4. Jesus instructs the disciples**

The disciples think it's best for the crowds to go away to find something to eat, but Jesus has a different idea. He says, "They don't need to go away. You give them something to eat."

That was rather a surprising instruction! And our next game involves listening carefully to instructions - for safety, and to make sure you go at the right time.

*You don't need a parachute to play this game, but it's fun if you have one to mushroom it each time and have players running under it.*

PARACHUTE: ALL THOSE: Players stand in a circle; the leader says "All those who ... [are wearing pink / have a dog / live in X / etc/]" and everyone who fits that description has to run across to find a different place in the circle. It's important to warn people beforehand to look out (especially for little ones) while running, to avoid collisions. After a couple of turns, the leader can choose volunteers to say "All those..."

#### **5. But there's not enough!**

Remember that there are thousands of people crowding around Jesus at this time. He's healed those who are ill, but they know he has more to offer them and they don't want to leave. And Jesus has told his disciples to feed them! Unsurprisingly, they're not convinced. They look at the crowds, and they look at Jesus, and then - he's had a long day, so they're very polite about it - they explain that they don't have enough for all these people.

So we were thinking about there not being enough for everyone . . . and we wondered if we had enough of these mats/chairs for everyone.

MUSICAL MATS/CHAIRS: Music plays while players walk around a row of chairs (traditionally arranged in two rows back-to-back, or in one row in alternating directions) or a row of carpet samples or foam mats: there should be one less than the number of players. When the music stops everyone has to sit on a chair or put a foot on a mat. The person who doesn't have a chair/mat is out. One chair/mat is removed. Play continues until there's a winner.

## **6. Loaves and fish**

So we've got crowds of people - thousands of them - and Jesus has told his disciples to feed them. What can they do? They bring him everything they have: five loaves of bread and two fish.

Do we have any loaves or fishes?

LOAVES AND FISHES TREASURE HUNT: Create a treasure hunt for paper cut-outs of loaves and fish, to fit your venue; have people play in family groups, with the aim of finding five loaves and two fish each.

## **7. Giving thanks**

The disciples have brought Jesus five loaves and two fish.

To feed thousands of people.

Five loaves and two fish. That's it.

And Jesus takes this tiny amount of food, and he tells all the thousands of people to sit down on the grass.

So ... sit down on the ... well, not the grass, but the floor. Let's make a circle.

Jesus is standing in the middle of thousands of hungry people. His disciples have given him everything they have, and it's not enough. How often have we had that feeling?!

But here's the amazing thing: all of these people, all of these thousands of people, have left their towns and trekked out into the back of beyond because they trusted Jesus to give them what they needed. And now they've done as they're told - they've obeyed him - when he asked them to sit on the grass.

So here we've got Jesus. And we've got some people who've given him everything they have, even though they think what they have to give is pretty rubbish. And we've got some people who've done as he's told them, even though it seems like a pretty odd thing to do in the circumstances: I know you're really hungry, guys, and it's getting late, and you can see that there's not enough food here for you all, but if you'd just sit down for a moment . . .

And now Jesus looks up to heaven, he gives thanks, and he breaks the loaves. Perhaps this is a good time for us to give thanks, too. Let's stand to sing number 19 in our song books: Thank You, Lord, For This Fine Day.

SONG

## **9. What next?**

So Jesus has given thanks - the Bible doesn't tell us what for - but maybe for the food, for the people's obedience, for God's unimaginable love and faithfulness - and now he hands the loaves and the fish to the disciples, so that the disciples can give them to the people.

And there's a moment, maybe, when the disciples are thinking, "Ok, we've done our bit. We've handed it all over to Jesus. What next? Will he really be able to meet the needs of all these people?"

Sound familiar? Sometimes when we pray it can feel just like that. "Ok, so we've taken it to Jesus. What next? Will he really answer?" And sometimes we have to wait for the answer. And sometimes the answer surprises us. But there is *always* an answer. Today's story starts with Jesus making people better when they ask him to, and we all know the ending: he meets all of their needs. We're going to bring our needs to him now.

## **PRAYERS**

## **10. Everyone eats!**

Thousands of needy people . . . five loaves and two fish . . . and Jesus. I told you that you knew the ending: "They all ate and were satisfied, and after everyone had eaten all they wanted, the disciples picked up twelve large baskets of leftovers. And there were about 5,000 men there, plus women and children."

Jesus *always* has enough for everyone. We just need to stay close to him and do what little things we can do - like pray, and be kind to other people - and watch in amazement as he takes our small offerings and does awesome things with them.

Let's stand to sing song number 3a: Gather Around.

SONG

MESSY GRACE

TEA