

## “Food, Glorious Food”

One of the most iconic scenes from any musical is the beginning of “Oliver!” The scene opens with the boys working at hard labor in the alms house. When they are called to mealtime, they sing the song “Food, Glorious Food.” They imagine all types of wonderful, tasty meals singing

“Food, glorious food!  
Hot sausage and mustard!  
While we're in the mood —  
Cold jelly and custard!  
Pease pudding and saveloys!  
"What's next?" is the question.  
Rich gentlemen have it, boys —  
In-di-gestion!”<sup>1</sup>

The reason for all this yearning is that the boys are fed an ongoing diet of gruel, which is a watery version of oatmeal; emphasis on the watery.

Like air and water, food is a basic need for all living things—animals, plants, insects, microbes, etc. Some creatures have bland diets. I am thinking of cattle, sheep and deer who eat grass. Some animals eat other animals. Others eat whatever is at hand. I watch birds eat seeds, insects or scraps of bread dropped on the ground. Little birds like to hang out at *alfresco* restaurants to get the little specks of food we drop as we eat.

Human beings are keen on variety. Heaven forbid that we eat the same thing two nights in a row. That desire for variety I am sure leads to the biology experiments that happen in the back of refrigerators. Remember how the Hebrews in the Book of Exodus tired of eating manna even though it was the food of angels. Even manna can grow boring to the human palate.

Food and eating are important aspects of the gospels. Jesus is attacked by the religious authorities for eating with sinners. In the Gospel of Luke, the observation is that Jesus is either on his way to a meal or has just left one. His detractors call him a drunkard and glutton. He is anything but that, but trash talk is nothing new.

Six times in the Gospels Jesus uses meager provisions to feed multitudes of people. Mark and Matthew report the miracle of feeding 4,000.<sup>2</sup> All four canonical gospels report the feeding of the 5,000.<sup>3</sup> It is the only miracle that is recorded in all four gospels. This consistency across the gospels indicates the importance to the early church of this miracle. It also tells us that it was such a well-known miracle that all four gospel writers had to include it. We also see in the reading from Second Kings that these were not the only feeding miracles

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<sup>1</sup>“Oliver!” Book, lyrics, and music by Lionel Bart, 1960.

<sup>2</sup> Matthew 15:32–39 and Mark 8:1–9

<sup>3</sup> Matthew 14:13–21; Mark 6:31–44; Luke 9:12–17; John 6:1–14

in the Bible. Additionally, there are the feeding miracles that happen during the Exodus from Egypt. That is the aforementioned manna from heaven and the quails that provided meat to the people when they tired of the manna.

What I find so remarkable about John's version of the feeding of the 5,000 is the person who steps up at the critical moment to provide a solution. It was not one of the disciples. Jesus asked Philip where they could buy enough bread to feed this group. Philip thought it would require a half year's wages just to have enough bread. Never mind that they were on the side of a mountain with no village bakery in sight. In this situation I expect that Philip and the other disciples would have said that Jesus should send the people home, but he did not. It is at this point that a boy appears offering five barley loaves and two fish to help feed the crowd.

I imagine the scene this way. The boy sees the disciples conferring with Jesus and being curious about the discussion he came close to them. Listening in he got the gist of the conversation. Next, he approaches the closest disciple, Andrew, and gives a tug on his cloak. Andrew turns around and the boy without any fanfare hands him a small package. Andrew opens it and sees two fish and five small barley loaves. Andrew turns back to the group and shows them what the boy offered. The disciples laugh at such a inadequate offering, while Jesus recognizes the solution in the child's offering.

The story continues with Jesus giving thanks and distributing the two fish and five loaves among the crowd. As the miracle unfolds the boy simply disappears. We do not hear him ask for thanks, we do not know if he was amazed by the results. We do not even know his name, only that he was a boy who made a seemingly useless offering in the face of such a dilemma.

I find it striking that the one who shows up with the beginnings to a solution, and the vehicle for Jesus' miracle is a child. The one paving the way is not a wise old man who knows Jesus can make a miracle happen with the right tools. He is not a Pharisee who wants to set up Jesus to fail by providing too little. He is not an angel come from heaven to work God's will and glorify the Son.

It had to be a child who provided the small offering. Too many adults are jaded by life. We focus on practicalities, hurdles, and costs much as Philip does. We do not leave room for community, hope, love, or even miracles. In contrast, many children still know that it is the action that is important. They know intuitively that a hug can change someone's life. They know a hand-drawn picture conveys love. They know that giving of themselves is what is important.

Their eyes are still wide open and not clouded by years of hearing "that won't work" or "we've already tried that" or "that is not the way we do things here." Their willingness to help seems boundless and is not weighed in a balance or against a cost/benefit analysis. They just engage and have faith.

And faith is what matters. Time and again Jesus says, “Your faith has made you well”<sup>4</sup> “Your faith has made you whole”<sup>5</sup> or “Your faith has saved you”<sup>6</sup> or “Let it be done according to your faith.”<sup>7</sup> I defy anyone to find Jesus saying, “Your cost-benefit analysis has made you whole” or “Your cynicism has saved you” or “Let it be done to you according to your plans.”

It is our faith in God that heals, restores, and makes the way clear for miracles. It is that same faith that leads a child to give five loaves and two fish to feed more than five thousand people. It is the humility, guilelessness, hopefulness, idealism, and magnanimity of children and youth which leads to miracles.

Instead of deciding in our very mature, world-weary, and all-knowing way that “it’s gonna’ take a miracle”<sup>8</sup> to solve a problem. We can take our cue from the boy in this lesson, and from our own children and grandchildren. Let us offer up what we have, great or small, and leave the miracles to God.

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<sup>4</sup> Luke 17:19, 18:42

<sup>5</sup> Matthew 9:22

<sup>6</sup> Luke 7:50

<sup>7</sup> Matthew 9:29

<sup>8</sup> “It’s Gonna’ Take a Miracle” by Teddy Randazzo, Bobby Weinstein, and Lou Stallman, 1965. My favorite version is by Laura Nyro on her album “Gonna Take a Miracle” with backing vocals by LaBelle.