

Gleaning In The Fields Of Light

Unsung Hero

“One of his disciples, Andrew, Simon Peter’s brother, said to him, ‘There is a boy here who has five barley loaves and two fish. But what are they among so many people?’ Jesus said, ‘Make the people sit down.’ Now there was a great deal of grass in the place; so they sat down, about 5,000 in all. Then Jesus took the loaves, and when he had given thanks he distributed them to those who were seated; so also the fish, as much as they wanted.”

—The Gospel of John

By Ken Woodley

The hero of this parable isn’t Andrew. And, despite this legendary miracle, the hero isn’t Jesus, either.

The heroic figure in this story is the anonymous the boy.

But perhaps we know more about him than we think.

We know that he came to see Jesus, and apparently alone because there is no mention of any parent or adult with him. So he is brave, questing and probably quite spiritual. Perhaps not unlike Jesus was as a youth.

And he brought five barley loaves and two fish. Nobody else in the crowd had any food readily visible. Why did the boy have the loaves and fishes? If he had traveled far, the bread and fish might have been all the food he had to survive the journey. Or, if he’d come only a short distance, the boy might have arrived prepared to share his food with others. For that is what he certainly did.

Either way, he is also of a giving, compassionate nature. Perhaps not unlike Jesus was as a boy. And that makes me wonder.

I especially wonder what Jesus said to the boy as Andrew and the other disciples were telling 5,000 people to sit down. Jesus didn’t just walk up and take the five barley loaves and two fish from the youngster. Of course not. He would have spoken to the boy about the hunger of the people all around him, and the wondrous possibilities if the boy gave him the loaves and fishes.

Jesus once said that unless one becomes like a little child it will be impossible for them to enter the kingdom of heaven. This parable shows us what he meant by that.

The boy didn't make a fuss about giving Jesus all of the food he'd brought with him. There was no argument. Their conversation attracted nobody's attention because there is nothing written about it. All the words were spoken quietly between Jesus and the boy.

Nor did the boy question Jesus' ability to feed so many people with so little food. No, Andrew, the adult, had done that. The boy simply gave Jesus the five loaves and two fish, fully expecting Jesus to feed everyone there.

The boy clearly had the strong faith of innocence, the kind of faith that could walk on water. I wonder if Jesus saw himself in the boy, recognized a kindred spirit. I suspect that he did.

No, there would have been no famous miracle without this unknown boy who knew the kingdom of heaven when he saw it. And, standing there with Jesus, that child made the kingdom of heaven manifest to the 5,000. And to us.

I wonder where in the world that boy is today.

Here's a thought:

You've got a barley loaf. I have a fish. Let's go in search of him.

After all, he may be waiting somewhere for us with Jesus.

And if we do undertake this journey and do somehow find him, we will also find ourselves.

