

**Giving****The story of Stone Soup – what happens when you share!**

A kindly, old stranger was walking through the land when he came upon a village. As he entered, the villagers moved towards their homes locking doors and windows.

The stranger smiled and asked, why are you all so frightened. I am a simple traveller, looking for a soft place to stay for the night and a warm place for a meal.

"There's not a bite to eat in the whole province," he was told. "We are weak and our children are starving. Better keep moving on."

"Oh, I have everything I need," he said. "In fact, I was thinking of making some stone soup to share with all of you." He pulled an iron cauldron from his cloak, filled it with water, and began to build a fire under it.

Then, with great ceremony, he drew an ordinary-looking stone from a silken bag and dropped it into the water.

By now, hearing the rumour of food, most of the villagers had come out of their homes or watched from their windows. As the stranger sniffed the "broth" and licked his lips in anticipation, hunger began to overcome their fear.

"Ahh," the stranger said to himself rather loudly, "I do like a tasty stone soup. Of course, stone soup with cabbage -- that's hard to beat."

Soon a villager approached hesitantly, holding a small cabbage he'd retrieved from its hiding place, and added it to the pot.

"Wonderful!!" cried the stranger. "You know, I once had stone soup with cabbage and a bit of salt beef as well, and it was fit for a king."

The village butcher managed to find some salt beef . . . And so it went, through potatoes, onions, carrots, mushrooms, and so on, until there was indeed a delicious meal for everyone in the village to share.

The villager elder offered the stranger a great deal of money for the magic stone, but he refused to sell it and travelled on the next day.

As he left, the stranger came upon a group of village children standing near the road. He gave the silken bag containing the stone to the youngest child, whispering to a group, "It was not the stone, but the villagers that had performed the magic."

Jesus says: be generous with your lives (Matthew 5 vv.13-16). Who are we in the story?

The stranger? The villagers? Or are we the cabbage or salt beef or potatoes, and carrots or mushrooms? Stone Soup is a simple folk tale that teaches that by working together, with everyone contributing what they can, a greater good is achieved. They make a difference.

*Or: use Rainbow Fish by Marcus Pfister.*

*Or:*

Take a piece of plain paper (A4)

Ask if someone knows what  $4-1=$  (answer 3)

Affirm that is the correct answer.

Explain that when Jesus came he brought a new law – a law of love which says that we should love God with all our heart, soul, mind and strength and treat our neighbour as we would want to be treated.

So take the piece of paper and get the congregation to count the corners (4)

Remove one corner.

Then ask the congregation to count the corners again (5)

Repeat the above (6 corners)

Remind the congregation of the old song: *“Love is something if you give it away, you end up having more”* (Magic Penny on You Tube).

In the early church the new Christians held everything in common. They just couldn't bear to be apart from one another. They were excited to be together for teaching, fellowship, breaking bread and prayers, things the Jerusalem church did together. These disciples are generous. They are not claiming anything as their own but, instead, are disposing of their personal property to meet the needs of others. This is more than togetherness – this is unity. This is not just human affection – this is Jesus' law of love.

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