

Being a Fish At Vacation Bible School
By
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When I was about 11 years old, I lived in Mt. Brook, a suburb of Birmingham. I lived on Caterbury Road at the intersection with Surrey Road. Many of my friends in the neighborhood lived on these two roads. Peter Barber lived across the street from my grandparents which was only 3 houses down from mine. We were the same age and on this particular summer, his church down in Five Points was having vacation bible school and he was asked to bring a friend. I didn't have much going on in late June and though I had never been, it sounded like it might be fun, even though I was a little bit scared going someplace where I didn't know anyone else.

So that particular Monday came and his mother picked me up and we were off to bible school. The churches I had attended locally in Mt. Brook were quite small places that most parents and kids went, and this one in Five Points (which was almost downtown Birmingham to me) was a giant building. There was a long staircase leading up to the entrance door on the side of the church. I supposed this was the class room area and was more removed than the main front doors of the church. Peter seemed to know where he was going and his lighthearted manner reassured me a bit about this strange and unfamiliar place and people I didn't know. When we entered the class area, there were other kids our ages, boys and girls, and they were chattering away as the class had not started yet. A nice young woman came over to me as Peter introduced me, and she smiled and said Peter had done a good deed to bring a "fish" that day. The woman wrote my name, "M.D.," on a small paper fish cut out of blue construction paper. I think the girl visitors got a pink fish. It was pinned to my shirt with a straight pin.

As the program got underway, I found out why I was called a fish. In the Sunday School class Peter had attended, they studied Peter the Fisherman who was told by Jesus if he wanted to follow him, he should become a “Fisher of Men.” Well, Peter Barber was also a fisher of men, sort of, he hooked me.

We had a lot of activities, arts and crafts things we made to take home, and we learned a lot of fun songs to sing. I think my most favorite and one I still remember to this day was the one called “John Jacob Jingleheimer Schmidt” and the words to it are below.

*John Jacob Jingleheimer Schmidt,
His name is my name too.
Whenever we go out
We hear the people shout,
"There goes John Jacob Jingleheimer Schmidt."
Dah dah dah, dah dah, dah dah,
John Jacob Jingleheimer Schmidt,
His name... [repeat ad infinitum]*

You just sang and sang the song until the teacher would signal we had come to the finish. At home I found out I could really get my parents to beg me to stop by singing it over and over. For a kid, that was as much fun as the song, and besides, it was a church song.

Most of the songs were good church songs and the other one that we kids loved to sing was “Onward Christian soldiers” because the words were so easy to remember and we’d march around like a pack of soldiers, perhaps even carrying a mock rifle on our shoulder. There were other stanzas, but the chorus was what we all remembered.

*Onward, Christian soldiers, marching as to war,
With the cross of Jesus going on before.*

I liked the vacation bible school a lot more than I had thought I might. I got to know many of the other children in the class and was having just as much fun as anyone. I am certainly glad Peter Pitts Barber chose me to be his “fish” that summer. It gave me some great memories to cherish.

Since my name was Smith and we often sang that song about *John Jacob Jingleheimer Schmidt*, I could pretend they were singing about me because “his name is my name too.”