

The Land of Fools

This Chinese folk tale illustrates the value of starting “where the person is” and moving ahead with a deliberate pace in our outreach and engagement work.

Once a man strayed into the world known as the Land of Fools where he saw a number of people fleeing in terror from a field where they had been trying to harvest wheat. “There is a monster in that field,” they told him. Upon close examination the man saw that it was a watermelon.

The stranger offered to kill the monster for them. He walked into the field, cut the melon from its stalk, took a slice and began to eat it. Now the people were more terrified of him than they had been of the melon. They drove him away with pitchforks crying, “He will kill us next, unless we get rid of him.”

Years later a second man strayed into the Land of Fools and the same thing happened to him. But, instead of offering to help them with the monster, he agreed with them that it must be dangerous, and by tiptoeing away from it with them he gained their confidence. He spent a long time with them in their houses until he could teach them, little by little, the basic facts which would enable them not only to lose their fear of melons, but even to cultivate them.