**Ekklessia: Worship for a Time Like This**

**Children in Worship: Taking Back the Sanctuary**

Start with questions:

1. If you had to turn to the person next to you and share your testimony of how you became a follower of Jesus, could you do it? And if so, where would you begin?

1.1 How many of the people in this room had never had an encounter with Jesus before the age of 18?

1.2 How many people in this room had a first encounter with Jesus before the age of 18?

**Share my testimony**

Encountering God all by myself next to my bed – much like the boy Samuel

But it would never have happened had I not encountered a lovely lady by the name of Auntie Lorna who invited me in.

**1 Samuel 3:**

*The boy Samuel ministered before the Lord under Eli. In those days the word of the Lord was rare; there were not many visions. One night Eli, whose eyes were becoming so weak that he could barely see, was lying down in his usual place. The lamp of God had not yet gone out, and Samuel was lying down in the house of the Lord, where the ark of God was. Then the Lord called Samuel. Samuel answered, “Here I am.” And he ran to Eli and said, “Here I am; you called me.” But Eli said, “I did not call; go back and lie down.” So he went and lay down.*

 *Again the Lord called, “Samuel!” And Samuel got up and went to Eli and said, “Here I am; you called me.”*

*“My son,” Eli said, “I did not call; go back and lie down.”*

 *Now Samuel did not yet know the Lord :The word of the Lord had not yet been revealed to him.*

 *A third time the Lord called, “Samuel!” And Samuel got up and went to Eli and said, “Here I am; you called me.”*

*Then Eli realized that the Lord was calling the boy. So Eli told Samuel, “Go and lie down, and if he calls you, say, ‘Speak, Lord, for your servant is listening. ’” So Samuel went and lay down in his place.*

 *The Lord came and stood there, calling as at the other times, “Samuel! Samuel!”*

*Then Samuel said, “Speak, for your servant is listening.”*

 *And the Lord said to Samuel: “See, I am about to do something in Israel that will make the ears of everyone who hears about it tingle*

***Mathew 18:1***

*At that time the disciples came to Jesus, asking, "Who is the greatest in the Kingdom of heaven?" So Jesus called a child to come and stand in front of them, and said, "I assure you that unless you change and become like children, you will never enter the Kingdom of heaven. The greatest in the Kingdom of heaven is the one who humbles himself and becomes like this child. And whoever welcomes in my name one such child as this, welcomes me. Mat 18:6 "If anyone should cause one of these little ones to lose his faith in me, it would be better for that person to have a large millstone tied around his neck and be drowned in the deep sea.*

***Mat 19:13*** *Some people brought children to Jesus for him to place his hands on them and to pray for them, but the disciples scolded the people. Mat 19:14 Jesus said, "Let the children come to me and do not stop them, because the Kingdom of heaven belongs to such as these."*

**Introduction**

A friend’s child was invited to go to church with his granny, and after having had his hair combed in ways it had never before been combed, and after having been forced into clothes he never liked to wear, he was forced to sit, stand or kneel silently for what seemed to be an eternity next to his granny. After half an hour of this he stood up on the pew an announced in a loud voice: ‘up down, up down, when will it ever end?’

And that day, I believe, God wept. Because it meant another child, who would grow into an adult, decided in their heart that church was not the place for them.

And we self righteously nod, because we have done much better. We have sent our kids to Sunday school where they can hear about God in words that they can understand and where they can have friends at church, and you know our kids *want* to go to church. But you know what? They don’t want to go to church. They want to go to *Sunday School*. And when they don’t want to go there anymore, they want to go to Youth, and when they don’t want to go there anymore they sure as hell don’t want to go to church, because they haven’t a clue what goes on there, and it is so alien to them, they don’t fit in. And so they go to the church down the road that still operates as a youth group – if they go at all. Instead of creating worshippers, we have created consumers of worship.

And after all those years of loving and teaching them, we lose them, because they don’t like the options we now offer them as adults. And as a result, we are facing a crisis of childlessness in the mainline denominations, threatening our very survival. And it is a crisis of our own making. And worst of all, our kids are the ones who are suffering because of it. We have broken our baptism vows to both God and the children themselves. For we promised then that we ‘*would so maintain the common life of worship and service that all the children among us might grow in the love and knowledge of our lord Jesus Christ*’ and we haven’t. We have chased them away. And yet, we have so much to offer them, and they don’t even know it, because they don’t want to come near the sanctuary.

So the question for us to each ask ourselves is this: **in my context, are we doing the work of reaching children more or less effectively than in the past? What has helped or hindered this work?**

Small groups - 5 minutes , then 5 minutes feedback

And then, I want us to consider three more questions:

1. In my context, do the children of my congregation love our sanctuary, or is it foreign to them?
2. n my congregations’ work with children and in my context, what do I think makes God smile?
3. In my congregations’ work with children in my context, what do I think makes God weep?

It is my contention, that if we are going to be able to offer to our children that gift which they need above all other gifts, the gift of relationship with God, then we need to take back the sanctuary on their behalf. But how to we even begin?

1. ***Let the Children In.***

Sunday school is important, but if the kids are never in the sanctuary they will never grow to love it. We have to make sure that at least once a month the kids, all the kids, are in the sanctuary, at least for a section of the worship. I suggest that we let them sit with their parents, and make sure that they have to sing at least one adult song, and sit through one adult prayer, and hear some notices, so that *who we are here* penetrates their psyches in a safe way. Just as children learn to love to brush their teeth, and eat brussel sprouts and appreciate knowing their tables, so children have to be taught to love church. But once they do, it is a gift that lasts their whole life through.

And then we must make sure they have fun: that they have a really creative, meaningful, short punchy message, that they sing a really funky kids song, and that it is not patronizing, but that the *adults all sing along with* because it is best song of the whole service

1. ***See the Children’s Time is a Gift to the Church.***
2. It is a time of fun and laughter. If you need to make changes, that is a great time to do it, *so long as it benefits the children*  because people are prepared to be more open to new ideas when it comes to the kids.
3. Having the children receive communion is a wonderful way of reminding us all that we are not Christians because we have arrived and know it all, but because of what God has done. That we can’t ever understand everything – all we can do is learn and learn and learn like they do, and never stop growing
4. Using a Children’s Bible to do one of the readings really brings that reading to life.
5. It teaches the children how to be in church
6. It teaches the adults how to make space for children in church
7. It teaches parents how to have children in church - that you teach the children the words of the songs in the car on the way to church, that you bring a Tupperware with a sandwich in it for during the sermon only, and a non spill bottle of juice, that you bring quiet toys for the sermon section and sit at the back or in the cry room when the child is iffy
8. It gives lonely grannies such joy to see the little ones, and it teaches little ones not to be afraid of oldies, but to respect and love oldies as people, not ‘them’ who don’t look like the ads.
9. ***Do it Well***
10. Make sure that you spend as much time/energy/ resources on the children’s address as you do on the address for the adults
11. Invest in as many age appropriate children’s bibles as you can
12. Be as creative as possible: using props, and costumes, balloon animals, ribbons, banners, puzzles, simple games, puppets (mops and brooms) actions, prizes, signing or pictures (posters, on the projector, tiny ones for each child)
13. Make sure the children AND the parents participate
14. Use older children to participate in leading prepared prayers (from age 6)
15. Use younger children (from age 2) to participate in bringing objects (e.g. processing in with flowers for Harvest Festival)
16. Use older children in the band and choir from as early as possible (I have used many children from 9 years old onwards, who still lead worship today)
17. If you are going to have kids sitting on the floor in the front of church en masse, intersperse adults among them to the ratio of one to five if possible - and the adults MUST participate in every way the kids are expected to.

**Conclusion**

If the Samuel story tells us anything, it is that in ‘the House of the Lord’ children are more than welcome: sometimes they are the only ones open enough to hear the word of the Lord. If we bar children from the sanctuary - for whatever good reason we can imagine - we are depriving ourselves of an amazing gift.

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Example Order of Worship *Orientation*

1. *for kids section of all age worship in sanctuary*
2. *No time at conference for Story*
3. *Please pretend to be children for this moment – your own son or daughter – aged about 9 years old*
4. *Please be enthusiastic!*

Example Order of Worship

*Welcome and Call to Worship ( No words on screen)*

*Welcome everyone! It is so good to be here, and to remember together that God is here. Now who can show me with their fingers how big God is? Who can show me with their noses and their mouths how big God is? Who can show me with their voices and arms how big God is?*

*Wow! He’s pretty big isn’t he? Aren’t you glad?!!*

*Let’s sing about that!*

***God is Big*** *(with actions)*

***Beautiful*** *(signing)*

*‘Popcorn’ prayers of praise*

*Liturgy prayers of intercession – on screen*

**Child One**: We are so grateful for so much, Jesus

**Child Two**: For colours and insects and clouds and fun

**Child Three:** But we know that there are children and grown ups who don’t have all that we have

**Child One**: Children who can’t see clouds and colours

**Child Two**: Grown ups who have forgotten how to laugh

**Child Three**: People who are sad

**Child One:** Will you help them Jesus?

**Child Two**: Will you help them through us, Jesus?

**Child Three**: so we can all see the wonder of all it is that you do

**All:** In Jesus’ name, Amen

***For All you Dodododo / The Lord is Closer***