

Transitioning Your Children Back to Church April 7, 2021

Truly, truly, I say to you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains alone; but if it dies, it bears much fruit. John 12:24

Lately, I have found myself needing more time outdoors to rest and reset during this stressful season. Because of this need, I got my husband to agree to a plan for a new raised garden bed, which somehow turned into 8! And now a lovely kitchen garden is beginning to take shape under my kitchen window.

Through the process of preparing soil, planting seeds or seedlings, I have been



reminded of how God often works beneath the surface before we ever see the fruit of his efforts; and how Jesus so often used the example of sowing and seeds to teach us about living in his Kingdom. When I plant a seed or even a dead looking dormant plant, I find myself thinking there is *no way* something is going to grow from this; there is *no way* fruit, or veggies or beautiful flowers will come from this tiny seed or “dead” stick I just put in the ground. The rational side of me knows about the life cycle of plants and how they grow, but there is still a part of me that doubts it could really be true. I can't help but notice how much faith it takes to water a patch

of earth every day, believing life will come, even without seeing what is happening beneath the soil.

As I reflect on our loss of time with our youngest members during the pandemic, it feels like we are experiencing a death of how things once were. As we come back, we are not likely to be able to open the nursery or offer Sunday School during service in the same way we did in the past. And yet I am not without hope because during this time of separation God has been giving me a vision for the formation of our youngest members and how He is the Good Shepherd, calling each one of us by name. He has reminded me of Jesus' words in the gospel of John, “*Truly, truly, I say to you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains alone; but if it dies, it bears much fruit.*” I am convinced that even though it's not obvious right now, God is preparing us for a time of new growth and hopefully much fruit.

But what does that mean for worship now?

It has already been a great joy to have our families with young children beginning to return to Sunday worship! But we must remember that all of us are out of practice when it comes to worshipping together as a whole church, and it may take some time to adjust.

There are a few things I would encourage all of us to remember about the importance of having our members of all ages together when we worship. If we think of worship as only a private experience of devotion or something for adults, we miss an important aspect of the Kingdom.

In reality, having small children with us during worship does mean that we will hear the sounds of children – ranging from talking to cries. Although, it may be tempting to think of these sounds as distractions, they can also be a reminder that we are called to enter the kingdom as a child.

For parents, it can be tempting to avoid the difficulties of bringing a child to church for many reasons:

- We worry about bothering those around us
- We wonder if they are getting anything out of the experience and think maybe we should wait until the child is “old enough”
- We think, I’m not getting anything out of this service because I am constantly having to guide my child(ren)

For those who wonder if children really belong in the service; or if the struggle to train the two year old to be part of the service is worth it, let me offer these thoughts:

- At baptism, we make a promise to do all that we can to support that person in the life of faith. This is not just for the adult, but also the infant. This means all members are called to welcome the young child’s presence in worship
- Children learn through movement and their senses long before they are able to express ideas with words. Their hearts and minds are shaped by participation in the liturgy and watching those ahead of them in the faith
- Parents, I would encourage you to consider that despite the challenges of bringing your young child to church you are actually getting the joy of passing your faith on to him or her. And what a great joy that is!

Last here are a few tips for making the transition back to in-person services.

Before the service:

- Prepare for our time together by packing some supplies or a small snack
- Consider listening to special music on the way to church to help set the tone
- Consider giving your child a word, color or phrase to ‘hunt’ during the service
- Check out one of the toys from our lending cart or grab a children’s bulletin to color

During the service:

- Relax. Children at different stages sometimes require more patience as they learn to worship. Some days will be easier than others, and that’s ok!
- Consider sitting towards the front to allow your child to see – as scary as this is for mom & dad, it can really help the child pay attention

- Be aware of the child's need for movement and encourage actions such as making the sign of the cross, inviting them to join with their bodies when we kneel, stand and sit; cuddle with your child
- Save the quiet toys for use during the sermon
- Engage their attention when you can – “join us” instead of “be quiet”, “did you hear ___?” instead of “listen”
- Some days are hard and you may need to “take The Screamer out”, help the child to calm down and come back when ready. This is not a failure, but part of the process!
- For those around the family with a fussy child, be supportive and trust the parent will handle it.

After the service:

- Talk with your child – did he or she observe anything during the service?
- Ask if there is anything your child would like to do in response to something in the service?
- Remember, Jesus our Good Shepherd, has already called your child by name and is inviting him/her to worship

Bringing our children to church really is like planting a seed, we may not see the fruit of our efforts right away, but we can be confident of this that He who began a good work in us is faithful to bring it to completion.

Yours in Christ,
Paula V.

Children's Ministry Leader