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A View From the Pew

Is the Children's Sermon for or by Children?

I miss children's sermons.

It's one of the most anxiety-inducing and unpredictable times during a worship service. As with everything in church life, the pandemic has changed how churches handle this moment. Some have asked children to remain in their seats and delivered the children's sermon from the pulpit or even canceled the sermon all together.

Many who deliver the children's sermon mistakenly aim it at the adults, using big words and deep concepts... "Today, girls and boys, we're going to talk about your hermeneutic..."

I've been guilty of this when I've had the opportunity to give the children's sermon. I've also fallen into the trap of talking down to the kids. The not-so-secret truth about children's sermons is that the most profound lessons come from the children rather than being directed at them. If you don't believe me, the next time you have a chance to be in a service with a children's sermon, look at and listen to the children.

Children wander away. Once the children are released from the confines of their seats with their families, they are suddenly emboldened to roam all over the place, even the choir loft or the pulpit.

Children talk about themselves. You have to be careful not to ask too many questions during the children's sermon or you will quickly get off topic.

Children grab attention. You'll see a mischievous grin when they know worshippers are watching them. If they know they've elicited a chuckle, they'll stick to that behavior no matter how embarrassed their parents become.

Children engage with the story. Even with their fidgeting and roaming, kids can make connections to the text that adults have become too dulled to experience.

During worship, children often lead in unexpected and insightful ways. It's the way the Holy Spirit teaches. If we can shut out the distractions, set aside our discomfort at their unorthodox responses, and soak in what they're really saying, we may actually learn something.

I look forward to the resumption of the children's sermon in our post-pandemic worship and will look for what the children can teach me.

Lance Wallace is a Baptist layperson and member of **Parkway Baptist Church** in Johns Creek, GA. He earns a living in higher education communications and writes a blog at newsouthessays.com.

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