

My DOs and DON'Ts of children's sermons

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The tricky truth about children's sermons is that it's easier to come up with bad ones than good ones.

Yesterday, a Sunday morning Twitter exchange with a few pastors got me thinking about my children's sermon approach, and how it differs from many of my colleagues. For example, when I saw [this site](#) and the idea of teaching about the bentover woman in Luke 13 with a bent spoon, I laughed out loud and closed my browser tab immediately.

Later, when I had time to reflect, I found some redeeming qualities to the suggestion, but the bent spoon as an object lesson still puts me off (as if osteoporosis is anything like a bad ice cream scoop — that's insulting both to our adults with bad backs and to our children's intelligence!). So, here's a few of my children's sermons DOs and Don'ts:

DO:

- My main resource is usually the Bible, usually a story (I say more [here](#)). I don't tend to tell moralistic stories from life — there's plenty of time for those outside of worship. Non narrative scripture lessons can work too, but narrative is probably better.
- Teach about worship, liturgy, our worship space, traditions, etc. For example, our congregation often sings the psalm appointed for the day, but rarely did so before I was pastor. So, as we began this practice, the children and I talked about singing psalms, and where we could find them in the Bible.
- One point. One point. One point. I try to make one point and stick to it.
- I've found that hand motions and using our bodies together works very well — I thought a very effective children's sermon took place when the reading was on a version of the Lord's Prayer, so I taught hand motions to the prayer and everyone — children and older folks — prayed it together with the motions.

DON'T

- I don't use myself as an example except to connect with the children (and not to connect or get a laugh from the non-children congregants).
- I don't usually use an object in my children's sermons. If I do, it's often a picture and very tied to the point of the children's sermon rather than a traditional "object lesson." It's not that I hate objects (though Calvin did call most of them "idols,") rather what I understand about children's learning development is that most of the

kids who come up for our children's sermon can't yet make the intellectual leap from an object to a point loosely tied to the object — "This chocolate is sweet, just like God is sweet to us" or anything like that. If it doesn't connect very clearly, I don't use it.

- I don't view the children's sermon as entertainment for the congregation, so I don't try to get the children to say funny things the congregation will enjoy; I keep open-ended questions to a minimum. Besides missing the point of worship, laughing at the children makes them objects that entertain rather than fellow worshipers. Objectification in worship is never good.
- I don't feel I must connect the children's sermon point to the longer sermon later, or even use the same text. Sometimes a children's sermon is a good way to teach a lectionary text not used otherwise.

I'd love to hear your thoughts. I'm certainly not a gifted children's sermonizer, and I'm always looking to learn more. For example, last time I posted on children's sermons, someone commented about a UMC church she knew where the children's sermon happened on a special rug unrolled for the occasion, on which the kids and a pastor huddle. But that pastor doesn't have a microphone, and another pastor with a microphone shares announcements from the pulpit while the children quietly huddle around the other pastor. Everyone worships, but the children aren't made the center of it. Sounds heavenly to me.

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