

The Children's Sermon

Although it is difficult to proclaim the gospel to children, it can be done, and it can be done well.

Common Failings

Why do some children's sermons fail?

Rambling. With children, time is of the essence. A good children's sermon gets directly to the point and then leaves it before the children lose interest.

Moralism. Christianity certainly has its standards and expectations, but the time and place to be moralistic with children is not during Sunday worship. Children's sermon should enable children to experience God's goodness and the caring of God's people. Children need to feel this more than they need to be advised about their behavior.

Humanism. Humanism tends to confuse the gospel with the wisdom of the ages or parental advice – something easy to do. No matter how it is dressed, worldly wisdom will always be advice about merely how to get along in the world.

Excessive teaching. Although every good sermon should contain at least a little sound teaching, children's sermons frequently slide into more than just a little. It is easier to teach because children have so much to learn, but proclamation of God's news needs to take precedence over mere teaching.

In Search of Better Ways.

There are many effective ways to proclaim the gospel to children:

Variety. No one type of presentation stands above the others. Striving to be creative and being unafraid to try something different will avoid mediocrity.

Simplicity and directness. Keeping it simple and direct for children may seem obvious, but so often the reverse happens. When speakers are not sure where they are headed, they tend to take detours while getting there. Another temptation is to try to do too much, to complicate what begins as a simple idea.

Targeting. Children are not all alike; age especially makes a difference. Therefore, target a sermon for a particular age group. Even if the other age groups are only grazed, at least one group receives special attention on a given Sunday. A targeted sermon also says to children that the speaker cares enough to enter into their world.

Open-endedness. Children can think. There is no need to neither beat them over the head with the obvious nor to tidy up all the loose ends and give them a complete package. Children can be given something to work out for themselves.

A good storyteller, for example, knows the most effective story is one where the meaning does not need to be spelled out. The story carries its message best when listeners find their own stories within the one being told.

Proclamation by presentation. How true it is that people learn by doing! An effective children's sermon is as rare as a truly great sermon, but children's sermons need to be a chore at best or a madcap zoo at worst. When targets are set high, striving will make speakers better proclaimers, not only to the children but to all the family of God

-Richard J. Coleman