

Why We Do Godly Play

The Story of Two Sets of Sheep

Godly Play is a children's program based on the Montessori methods of teaching. Godly Play is a way of looking at life, God, and children, differently. It turns out, at least so at Church of the Redeemer, that it can also be very important for adults. This can be hard to explain. In Godly Play, when something is hard to explain we tell a story.

Once there were two sets of sheep. I made one set to use for the first Godly Play story I would tell – the Parable of the Good Shepherd. I had about 10 minutes to make them; maybe someday I'll tell that story too. Be that as it may, I brought the sheep and the Good Shepherd home on a Saturday evening; my wife had bought the different colored felt fabrics I needed to use to make the rest of the story materials I needed. I had part of an evening to finish making the materials and then I had to rehearse to tell the story the next day.

I asked my daughter Susan if she would help me make the story materials. She agreed. I showed her the shepherd and the sheep. The shepherd passed inspection; the sheep did not. Too impressionistic I think, with what my wife calls neutral colors – browns, tans and shades of gray. Susan offered to make some others for me. I accepted. In about 20 minutes she produced “her” sheep – each with 4 legs in a row, an elongated wooly head and a much more sheep-like body. They came in assorted colors – off white and dark gray, orange, blue and green. Hmmm, not quite what I had in mind. But then again, they were definitely recognizable and “kid friendly”. I was going to tell the parable twice the next day – I would use Susan's sheep at our Kids Church service and my sheep at our Rite II service.

We had already discovered that Godly Play touched adults in ways we had not anticipated, which was why I would tell the Parable of the Good Shepherd at both our services. As we had seen before, it was the Wondering Questions that really seemed to go to the heart of things.

“I wonder, do these sheep have names?” The kids answered immediately, “Greenie”, and “Orangie” and in a rush, “Whitey, Blackie, Bluey!” Their excitement, interest and involvement in the story were palpable. They were engaged. We continued to wonder.

An hour or so later, I asked the question again, “I wonder, do these sheep have names?” There was a long pause. It was very quiet. Reflective silence? Was it too long? I waited longer... and then a woman spoke up. “Joan... and Jim”. “Bill.” And then, “Ann.”... And yes, we adults continued to wonder too.