



Godly Play – a way of wondering together

Claire Wells talks about 'Godly Play'.....

It was at a Children's workers' training day that I first encountered 'Godly Play'. As we sat in a circle on the floor, Martyn Payne from brf told us the story of Abram and Sarai using a box of sand and simple, beautifully crafted wooden figures. His voice was calm and measured. His focus was on the events unfolding in the sand. His words, body language and hand gestures were purposeful and profound.

After the story, he looked up and asked some questions that drew out profound and simple wondering 'I wonder what part of the story you liked best?' 'I wonder which part is important?', 'I wonder where you are in the story or what part of the story is most about you?' 'I wonder if there is any part of the story we can take away and still have all we need?'

Then we were invited to respond with time for quiet reflection through art, reading, browsing or even using sand and the figures we had just seen or any of the resources laid out around the room.

After a while, we were drawn back into the circle and each had a cup of water and a biscuit. It felt like a feast!

I returned home inspired and eager to learn more. Next morning as I was sipping tea in bed, I retold the story to my young using digestive biscuit pieces as the people, and the duvet as the vast expanse of dangerous desert! I even recalled the four questions and posed them for the children and we wondered together.

Since then, I have been attending training days at the permanent Godly Play classroom in Trumpington, near Cambridge and I have recently become an accredited Godly Play teacher. In my work, I visit primary schools on a regular basis offering Godly Play sessions for children in KS1 and 2. It enables children to explore their own spirituality in a creative, imaginative and non-coercive way. My role as a Pastoral Assistant with my church also opens up opportunities for Godly Play with children in small groups on Sundays or midweek and with adults for taster sessions, and study/quiet days.

So what is Godly Play?

Godly Play is a method of Christian education and spiritual direction for children developed in the US over thirty years ago and based on Montessori principles.

It uses religious language, parable, sacred story, silence and liturgical action to help children become more fully aware of God's presence in their lives. It nurtures spiritual journeying and encourages children to wonder within a safe space as they are listened to with full acceptance and affirmation.

Children are fully capable of a personal sense of the divine and will strive to create meaning from experiences that point them to a reality beyond themselves, their immediate context or understanding. How often have you been amazed by a child's capacity to describe a glimpse of heaven, or been lifted into a new understanding by the clarity of a child's awe and wonder of things spiritual?

Jesus knew the power of this child-like trust, humility and openness to God when he responded to the disciples' questions about who is greatest in the Kingdom of Heaven. (Matthew:18 v 3) Jesus brought a little child into their huddle and in doing so, brought the child fully into the equation. This is the essence of child theology.

'Godly Play' has inclusive and therapeutic applications and has also been used in special needs settings. It is multi-sensory in its delivery and does not require or impose specific responses and is not coercive in its method. It seeks to learn from the rich heritage of language, symbolism and colour and from Christian festivals and worship.

The foundations of 'Godly Play' are essentially rooted in Bible teaching although its method allows it to be experienced by children of other or no specific faith as well as in Christian and mixed groups. It can also be very valuable to adults who may be surprised by the way that experiencing a bible story or message speaks to them when presented in a different way.

As we go on our spiritual journeying together, there may be opportunities to use Godly Play as a way of wondering together. We can explore the depth of the word of God in a new way and new revelations will open up as we see things in a new light.

Godly Play - not just for children.

Godly Play appeals to the child in all of us. It can be used for exploring issues together, for listening to each other and sharing ideas in community. It does not require a 'childish' response but a childlike openness which is the essence of Jesus' message to us all about the Kingdom of God.

Useful sites include:

www.godlyplay.org.uk - the UK website for Godly Play with articles on Children's Spirituality and the practical and theological aspects of Godly Play.

www.godlyplay.com - The US website with details of resources and the theological basis for Godly Play.

