

USING WONDERING QUESTIONS WITH CHILDREN

Learning in Christian community is a shared responsibility. Seniors teach children. Children teach youth. Youth teach adults. We learn from each other. Asking the right questions can be an important part of Christian education programs. The right questions can build community and encourage faith.

Imagine that you are a teacher of children. You have just told this story. A woman who owns ten silver coins loses one. She lights a lamp, sweeps the house and searches carefully for it. And when she finds it, she calls together her friends and neighbours for a celebration.

As teachers, our first instinct is to ask questions after a story. We may ask, for instance, "How many coins did the woman originally have?" The children would put up their hands and answer, "Ten." Then we would ask, "What did the woman do when she discovered that a coin was missing?" The children would again wave their hands and say, "She swept the house." Then, as a grand finale, we would ask, "What did she do when she found the coin?" and the children would inform us that she had a party. These questions have succeeded in feeding back the story to the leader.

Why do we ask questions like these? We do it because our Sunday school teachers used questions like that when we were children. We do it because this is often the way elementary teachers approach learning—they want to know that the children have the essential facts. We probably also ask questions like this because we don't know any other way to ask them.

But there are other approaches. "Wondering questions" draw people into a story and can be used with people of any age. Strictly speaking they are not questions at all, but open-ended statements that link the story and the listener's lived experience. Wondering questions can build community. They encourage people to talk with each other as well as to the leader. They evoke awe, mystery, contemplation. Wondering questions can invite theological reflection—even in very young children. They lead to continued reflection. Wondering together is a way of staying open to the Holy Spirit.

Let's return to the story of the lost coin. It is a wonderful story and quite straightforward. You have decided to trust that the children have listened well so that you don't need to ask questions and have them repeat the facts. Instead you invite them into the story by asking wondering questions.

You say things like . . .

I wonder how this woman felt when she discovered that a coin was missing . . . ?

I wonder how this woman felt when she found her coin . . . ?

I wonder why Jesus used a woman in this story . . . ?

I wonder if you have ever lost something that is very important to you . . . ?

I wonder if you have ever been lost and someone found you . . . ?

After wondering questions are presented, the leader may pause for a while. A conversation will ensue. If no one responds, that is fine. The leader may then ask another wondering question. It is not necessary for the leader to supply the "correct" answer. In the wondering responses there are no right and wrong answers. In fact, because much about God is a mystery, there may be no clear answers at all.

Wondering questions help both children and adults come to "knowing" on their own. Knowing is more than the remembering of facts; it is also a way of getting inside the story or experience, a way of experiencing the story and drawing closer to God and to other Christians. Above all, the wondering questions remind us that we all learn from each other about the mystery, awe, and wonder of God.

WONDERING QUESTIONS THAT MAY BE USED WITH STORIES

Noah

- I wonder what it was like in the ark in all that rain . . . ?
- I wonder how it felt to look out and see that you were surrounded by water . . . ?
- I wonder what God was thinking about the animals and people in the ark . . . ?
- I wonder if you have ever worried about a big rain storm . . . ?

Abraham and Sarah

- I wonder how Abraham and Sarah felt when God asked them to move to a new home . . . ?
- I wonder how Abraham and Sarah heard God's voice . . . ?
- I wonder if you have ever gone somewhere and didn't know where you were going . . . ?
- I wonder how God can be in so many places at once . . . ?

The Ten Commandments

- I wonder how it would feel to be able to do anything you want . . . ?
- I wonder how Moses felt as he went up that mountain . . . ?
- I wonder if it's hard to love God and to love people . . . ?
- I wonder what Moses and God talked about . . . ?

Christmas

- I wonder what people felt when they saw the newborn baby . . . ?
- I wonder if some people in Bethlehem didn't know that a special baby had been born . . . ?
- I wonder what Bethlehem is like today . . . ?
- I wonder how the people who live in Bethlehem celebrate Christmas . . . ?



The Baptism of Jesus

I wonder how people felt when John told them to change the way they lived and get ready for the Son of God . . . ?

I wonder if it is hard to change the way we live . . . ?

I wonder how Jesus felt when he came out of the water . . . ?

I wonder how you get ready to serve God . . . ?

The Temptation of Jesus

I wonder what it was like for Jesus to be alone in the desert for such a long time . . . ?

I wonder how Jesus and God talked in the desert . . . ?

I wonder how Jesus knew that the evil one was near him . . . ?

I wonder if it is hard for you to say "No" to something you should not do . . . ?

The Parable of the Great Banquet

I wonder how it felt to be invited to this great feast . . . ?

I wonder what the names are of the people who came to the feast . . . ?

I wonder why some people came but others wouldn't . . . ?

I wonder if you have ever been at a feast table like this one . . . ?

I wonder where this table might really be . . . ?

Jesus and the Children

I wonder how the children felt on their way to see Jesus . . . ?

I wonder how they felt when the disciples said, "No!" . . . ?

I wonder what Jesus said to the children . . . ?

I wonder what it is like to be close to Jesus . . . ?

I wonder what you would like to say to Jesus if you were invited to sit on his knee . . . ?