



EQUIPPING FOR... CHRISTIAN EDUCATION

Children's Ideas for Lent and Easter

By Rev. Dr. Emily Bisset

“Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! By his great mercy he has given us a new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead...”

— 1 Peter 1:3

The story of Easter is one of the cornerstones of the Christian faith. Through Christ's resurrection we discover that death is not final and that God has prepared for us a future beyond our imagining – a new life beyond death! In this issue of *Equipping for Christian Education* the Rev. Dr. Emily Bisset describes two unique ways that congregations can teach children (and congregants!) the wonder and mystery of the Easter season.

Hallelujahs¹

You'll need:

- 2 Large Cardboard Boxes (6 cubic foot boxes that you can get from a Moving Supply Store worked really well)
- 12 or more helium balloons
- Wrapping paper

The word, “Hallelujah” is a great part of our Easter celebrations. We sing it many times over in hymns like “Jesus Christ is risen today.” We often use it as part of



our Easter greetings and liturgy (the last verse of “All Creatures of our God and King” works beautifully for a doxology throughout the Eastertide). Kids love to say it – and shout it out!

Hallelujah is a word devoted solely to praise. It is, in many ways, a nonsensical word or even gibberish. It is the word we utter when we are all out of other words. It is the word we say when we are teeming with joy, but do not know how to express such joy. So we string some syllables together and turn them into a burst of praise.

¹ The basis of this idea came from a workshop at the annual Association of Presbyterian Church Educators' Conference (APCE) in 2015.

Some Christian traditions do not allow the expression of “Hallelujah” to be uttered throughout Lent. This is not generally the practice of Reformed tradition of worship because we believe that every Sunday is a “little Easter.” That is, every Sunday is a celebration of the Resurrection, the first day of the week, even throughout Lent: so hallelujah is always an appropriate expression of praise on a Sunday morning. However, giving up hallelujahs for a season could be an interesting and fun experiment for a congregation, especially if it was an intentional Lenten fast from the joy of this word. Reserving Hallelujah for Easter Sunday morning could heighten our awareness and joy as we celebrate the Resurrection. Using this idea to help children and adults celebrate the Resurrection could be done in two parts or by itself on Easter Sunday morning.

Two part children’s focus on hallelujah:

On Transfiguration Sunday or the First Sunday in Lent:

Use your children’s time to capture the hallelujahs and pack them away for the rest of the Season. Take some time to talk about hallelujah as an ancient expression of praise and sheer joy. Use the occasion to educate children and adults that every Sunday in the Reformed tradition is a celebration of the Resurrection, but explain that this Lent we are going to fast from hallelujahs. We are going to store them up and then release them on Easter Day. Perhaps have a big empty box or two to store the hallelujahs. You could have the children prepare some pictures of hallelujahs the week before in Sunday School or their worship centre and bring them in to put in the boxes. You could have the congregation say or sing some hallelujahs and give the children some fishing nets to capture them. Once you have gotten the hallelujahs in the boxes,

close them up. Perhaps there is a place in your sanctuary or Christian Education area to put the boxes where you can see them and talk about them occasionally throughout the season.

On Easter Sunday:

For Easter Sunday morning, prepare one or two large boxes that you collected the hallelujahs by wrapping them with colourful paper, leaving the top open. Fill them with helium balloons in a variety of colours, each with a colourful ribbon. Cover the open top of the box with a single piece of wrapping paper. If your sanctuary space is large with high ceilings, you will want to anchor the balloons with weights, using a



long ribbon so that when they are released they may look they are going to go all the way to the ceiling, but don't. If you anchor them, arranging them in cascading heights can fill the space most effectively. If your worship space is not as cavernous, you may consider just letting them go free.

At the children's time, remind the children of how you collected up the hallelujahs at the beginning of Lent. Refresh everyone's memory of what the word hallelujah is. Tell the children that it is time to let the hallelujahs out of the box. Invite them to pick up the boxes and wonder what the hallelujahs will look like. You might want to suggest that the hallelujahs have been increasingly anxious and excited about being let out again. You might wonder together if they have grown or multiplied inside the box(es) over the season of Lent. Allow the children to tear into the boxes, releasing the hallelujahs! You might choose to sing or say a chorus of hallelujahs together to conclude the children's time. Be sure you have enough balloons, so that at the end of the service every child can take a hallelujah home!

On Easter Sunday only:

Prepare one or two boxes to look like large presents, leaving the top open. Fill them with helium balloons in a variety of colours and place the boxes in a prominent place in the worship space. See notes above regarding anchoring the balloons or letting them go all the way up to the ceiling.

When the children come forward for children's time, you can ask them to point out things that are different or special for Easter. They may notice Easter flowers or banners or the liturgical colours, and of course the boxes. You can ask them if there are any special words that we say for Easter. They may suggest words like "risen" or "love" or "empty tomb." Steering the conversation to the word hallelujah, you can ask them what it means or what it feels like to say hallelujah and why we have such a strange, nonsensical word. Suggest to them that we need even more hallelujahs to help us celebrate the amazing fact that Jesus is risen – beautiful, hallelujahs that can reach up to the sky to praise God. Invite them

to wonder about what might be inside the boxes and let them pick the boxes up or tap them a little. When the time seems right, tell them to go ahead and open them up! When the balloons emerge from the boxes, ask the children, "What are those? I know that they look like balloons, but what are they really?" After receiving their answers, assure everyone that they are, in fact, beautiful hallelujahs to praise God. Be sure you have enough balloons, so that at the end of the service every child can take a hallelujah home!

End the children's time with a prayer:

Dear God,
Thank you for Easter morning! Thank you for words like (use some the words that the children suggested here). Thank you for the word "Hallelujah" – a word that sounds silly and means that we praise you. (Softly, with each repetition getting louder)
Hallelujah, hallelujah, hallelujah, hallelujah!
Jesus is risen! He is risen, indeed! Amen.

Eat Dirt?

You'll need:

- A clean flowerpot (ceramic works best)
- chocolate cake, crumbled very finely
- a flowering plant
- a watering can, perhaps

Crumble the chocolate cake into the flowerpot. When the children come up for the children's time, be sure you are holding the flowerpot in your lap and keep in close to you (don't let the smell of the chocolate cake give you away!). Have the plant next to you or in front of you. Tell the children that you got this flowering plant for Easter and you would like to plant it in the pot. Depending on the age of the children present, ask them what plants need to grow. Tell them you have prepared the pot already and ask them what it is inside the pot. Hopefully they will say dirt or soil. As soon as someone gives that answer, affirm it by saying, "Are you sure?" Ask if someone is willing to taste the



dirt. There will likely be some resistance. Encourage them to be brave and taste the dirt. It is likely that someone will eventually volunteer, but you might want to have a Sunday School teacher or colleague ready to help. Once someone tastes the dirt, and reacts, ask them to tell everyone else to try it to. See how long it takes for the others to agree to try it as well, and watch the children's reactions carefully. (In my experience, you may still have one or two that hold out!). Explain to the kids that they thought the flowerpot held dirt, because they were expecting it to be dirt.

Depending on the age of the children present, ask or talk to the kids about what Mary Magdalene and the other women who went to the tomb early in the morning expected to find. The expected to see the tomb, with the stone rolled in front of it, with Jesus' body inside, because he was dead. But when they got there, nothing was as they expected it to be. The stone in front of the tomb was rolled away, all by itself! Jesus was not dead, but alive! Instead of finding Jesus's body, they found an angel telling them not to be afraid! They went there expecting nothing but sad news ... kind of like dirt; but they found something

wonderful ... kind of like chocolate cake! The women weren't sure at first whether to believe it, but it was such good news they went and told everyone! If that same experience was reflected among the children's reluctance to believe the original dirt-eater, point out that really good news is sometimes hard to believe it is so good, especially when you are expecting bad news. Tell the children that you will put the flowerpot of chocolate cake out at the coffee hour with some bowls and spoons, so that they – and everyone – can eat dirt after the service. (For added fun, add a bowl of gummy worms beside the flowerpot in the coffee hour.)

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