



transforming church
for all ages

All-Age Worship

Sermon Outline

All-age worship: Acts 2: 42-47

“Do you question whether it is just another fad or the latest idea; that doesn’t seem to work for you?”

In his letter to the Corinthian church, as Paul writes, ‘though [the body of Christ] is made of many parts, they form one body’. This is an often-used passage to argue how we should get along in church life, put up with one another and recognise the differences that make us all unique. The problem is that hearing it is one thing, living it out is something totally different.

The term ‘all-age’ is often used in church life when referring to a particular service, meeting or time of worship – often something people have strong opinions about. There is a need to take a fresh look at what it means to be an all-age church - intergenerational in our approach to living as disciples of Jesus. In her book *All-Age Worship*, Lucy Moore writes that, ‘an all-age church reflects the very nature of a diverse yet unified God’.

All-age is not another ‘fad’, it’s biblical. We’ve ‘packaged’ it though, and need to rediscover being the family of God. The fellowship of the believers as demonstrated by the believers in Acts 2, points us towards the need to look afresh at the challenges of ‘all-age church’ and not to dismiss it as just another model in church life that will come and go.

The notes below are offered as suggestions to prompt your own thinking rather than as a ready-made sermon structure.

Background

The passage follows on from the account of the day of Pentecost. It shows the effect it has upon the believers, who are described in verse 42 as meeting together for a number of different reasons. They learnt from the apostles teaching, growing purposefully as followers of Jesus. They fellowshiped with one another, showing care and compassion for one another. This is detailed physically in verse 45, but would have built on the teachings of Jesus in terms of pastoral fellowship as well. They spent time breaking bread together, something we may or may not engage children and young people in, or perhaps only tokenistically? Finally it references them praying together, something Jesus did often. This is a passage that goes on to paint the picture of a community of believers not depicted or detailed by age, as is often the case with the church today, but by intent, actions and God’s movement, seen in verse 46 and 47. Is it a picture that is actually unfamiliar to us, one that we don’t think would work today or one we may not truly have considered?



The sermon – questions and suggestions

- » In Acts 2: 42, there are four specific things detailed that the believers were doing together. How are these a starting point for us to think through how we are living as an all-age church?
- » We read that ‘all the believers were together and had everything in common’ (Acts 2: 44). There is no specific reference to children or young people in the passage, but then why would there have been if they were naturally part of the family and the ‘church’ gathering?
- » In verse 46 we read that every day they met together. That may not be possible or practical for us today (a whole other debate), but have we gone to the other extreme? Do we only meet when it suits us, or our needs and interests are met? Do we need to consider what picture is being modelled amongst children and young people?
- » Throughout the bible we see God using children and young people to fulfil his purposes. Do we put a ceiling on what God can and will do through the lives of our children and young people?
- » The passage is a picture of what it means to be the family of God. It does not give a five point plan of how we should run the services, programmes or events that make up our church life though. The balance between all-age and age-appropriate activities is an area each local church needs to grapple with.

What are some of the issues to consider in grappling seriously with what it means to be an all-age church community?

- » Firstly, the issue of guidance needs to be considered. Proverbs 22: 6 reminds us that what we input into children and young people will stay with them. Obviously that doesn’t mean the children and young people we work amongst won’t have doubts or ‘walk away’ from the church, but it does mean we need to take seriously the ways in which we help them grow, question and engage with the opportunity to discover Jesus, and follow him.
- » Secondly, the challenge of empowering needs to be worked through. Throughout the bible, children and young people are released to serve God, Samuel being one such example. However much Eli let God down and failed to serve him faithfully, when God spoke to Eli he encouraged Samuel to respond accordingly. We need to be helping children and young people, empowering them to respond to the purposes of God in their lives. There needs to be space to encourage them to seek the gifts God has for them and opportunities provided for them to test what they/we believe God is saying to them in a safe, yet appropriately stretching environment.
- » Thirdly, the key recognition that it is an experience for all to engage with together. By its very nature an all-age church involves all ages. Acts 2 illustrates this, as the believers were taught, fellowshiped, shared communion and prayed together. Not getting caught up in the idea that the ‘all-age service’ is the only way we can be an ‘all-age church’, we need to look for other ways to celebrate our diversity and unity together.



Questions for further thought and discussion

- » In what ways as a church have you let children and young people down, by not recognising the part they are within the life of the church?
- » How can children and young people be a part of the on-going discussions, development and growth of your church?
- » What is one purposeful step/action that, if taken, would help you to develop as an all-age church?

Notes and illustrations

Have displayed and reference the two large pieces of paper - one with the words 'Young people are the church of tomorrow' on, the other with 'Young people are part of the church of today', and the young people's response and thoughts to these two statements.

Have a large puzzle at the front so everyone can see. Make sure some pieces are missing to represent the children and young people of the church.

Give everyone a puzzle piece - children, young people and adults - to take away with them.

Print out and enlarge the African proverb 'It takes a village to raise a child' so it can be fixed up and seen by everyone.

Reference a family gathering at Christmas, where all ages get together and engage with one another – what can this teach us about what it means to be a church of all-ages?

Recognise the things to celebrate currently in how your church is seeking to be an all-age church community. Give thanks for these things.

Further Reading

Body Beautiful? Recapturing a Vision for All-age Church,
Philip Mounstephen and Kelly Martin

All-Age Worship, Lucy Moore

Gathering around the table: children and communion,
Baptist Union of Great Britain

Baptist Basics 9: Children in the church
Baptist Union of Great Britain



Children's Session

All-age worship: Acts 2: 42-47

How can we make the most of the times when we gather together as a whole church?

Introduction

These sessions are designed to complement the sermon outlines that are part of this resource. These sessions use the same passages to explore the same themes in a way that is relevant to children, and to enable to cross-over in terms of discussion between children and their parents.

Each session is divided up into eight sections: Welcome, Game, Quick Quiz, Bible Story, Thought, Activity, Prayer response and Finish. Apart from the activity, about five minutes should be allowed for each section. The activity is likely to take longer, nearer ten minutes.

The session outlines are not intended to be rigid programmes you must stick to. If there are regular elements to the times when you meet with the children in your group, include these, and do not be afraid to add in extra games or activities that you think would further enhance the session.

It is a good idea to plan ahead in order to ensure you have the resources needed for the session. If there is a rota of people who teach the children's groups at your church, it would be a good idea to get together ahead of the sessions so you can ensure as much continuity, and an overall sense of unified direction in terms of what you will be communicating.

Please note that these sessions are written to be used with children aged 5-11, however some elements may need to be adapted to suit younger children.

Welcome

As the children gather, have the banner/poster from the previous session for them to decorate together. With the words 'Today...not tomorrow - Transforming the church for all ages' written on it, provide colouring pens or pencils for the children to use, remembering that this does not have to be completed in one session, but is designed to take the six weeks.

As the children gather and start to colour, begin by asking how they are doing that day. Once they've had a chance to share briefly, ask them the following two questions:

- » What colour would you use to describe the week you've just had?
- » What was one thing that happened this week that was hard work?

Share with the children how, over the next few weeks when you meet, you will be looking at different topics that will help everyone think about the phrase on the banner and what it means.



Game

Bring along a selection of jigsaw puzzles, making sure they have the same number of pieces and are not too difficult, so will not take too long to complete - 20-40 pieces.

Split the group up, giving each small group a puzzle to complete, seeing who can complete their's the quickest.

Share with the children how, in the same way that every piece of a jigsaw puzzle is important, the bit of the bible you are going to look at reminds us how we all have a part to play in the life of the church.

Quick quiz

The following three questions are designed to help get the children thinking. You may simply want to ask them for their response, you could get them to write them on post-its and stick them up, maybe talk with the person next to them or something else.

- 1 Do you enjoy the times when the whole church meets together - children, youth and adults - and why?
- 2 How important do you think it is for the whole church to meet together, not just in our age groups?
- 3 What would you add to make the times when the whole church meets together even better?

Bible Story

Briefly set the scene of the passage, explaining how before ascending (returning to heaven) Jesus told his disciples to wait in Jerusalem for the Holy Spirit. Share with the children how the Holy Spirit came on what we know as the Day of Pentecost. Finally explain that the bit of the bible they are about to hear follows on from the Day of Pentecost.

You might want to bring in props to help illustrate the story. If one of the children would like to read then invite them to read Acts 2: 42-47, whilst the other children act out the different things the 'believers' were doing.

Thought

The thoughts are split into three subsections; the 'Grab' serves as an introduction and something to 'grab' their attention. The 'What does it say?'; refers to the bible passage and brings out something of the teaching from the bible directly. The 'What should we do?' then applies the teaching to their lives, helping them think through what difference this should all make in their lives.

Grab

Show the clip from the film *Gnomeo and Juliet* where the blue gnome Billy unleashes the Terrafirmator (big scary lawnmower), only for it to go crazy and start destroying both the blue and red gardens. End when Gnomeo and Juliet come out from under the rubble, having survived.



What does it say?

Explain to the children that you are going to read through the passage again, only you would like the children to listen and see if they can spot the four different things the 'believers' did together? Once they have remembered them, explain what each one means and then ask them what they think is meant by the phrase 'all the believers'. You may want to give them some options, such as adults, important people, families or church leaders. Share with the children that what is so exciting is that it's talking about everyone. Whereas in church we often separate into different groups and activities - children, youth, adults - they were doing everything together.

What should we do?

Remind the children about the clip from the film *Gnomeo and Juliet* and the different types of gnomes that live in the two gardens. Share with the children that, although there are the two groups of gnomes, the reds and the blues, as the clip showed, they realised that their fighting was not helping anyone and almost cost them greatly – when they thought Gnomeo and Juliet had both been smashed by the Terrafirmator.

Explain to the children that there are many ways we separate people because of differences, one being age. Often in church that is how we separate people - for example, children, youth, adults and the elderly. Go on to say that as a church you are all thinking about how this can be changed in some ways to be more like the passage from the bible. Make sure you point out that there are times when age-appropriate activities work better, but that should not always be the case.

Activity

To help the children think about the fact that the church is for all-ages, explain that they are now going to get the opportunity to make some spoon puppets. Depending on your budget either use plastic dessert spoons or wooden spoons; whatever though, be as creative as you can in what you provide for them to decorate their spoon. If possible, have enough materials so each child can make more than one puppet, thus of two different ages.

Some ideas of how to decorate their spoons:

- » Eyes – you can buy packs of googly eyes from most arts and craft shops. If not, small pieces of paper cut out and stuck on, or simply pen-drawn eyes will work.
- » Hair – wool or string works well, or for more spikey hair that can be shaped, why not try using pipe cleaners.
- » Nose – a rolled up ball of paper stuck on can make a great nose, or a piece of twisty pasta.
- » Mouth – wool or string again will work well, although foam sheets can be bought from most arts and craft shops and will mean the children can make more expression-filled mouths.
- » Clothes – simply outlines cut out on card which can then be decorated using whatever materials you have - from pens, to paint to sequins and other craft items.

The main thing is to encourage the children to be unique in their designs and to think about how they can make the puppets distinguishable as representing the different generations within the church family.



Prayer

As you draw the session to a close, ask the children if there is anything they would like to talk to Jesus about, to pray about. It could be about something from the session today or something else. Make sure the children are given a chance to share and do not belittle any of their requests, however trivial we might think them to be.

Having given them all a chance to share, explain how you will now have a time talking to Jesus and any of them who would like to talk out loud can do so, although they can also talk to him quietly in their heads. You might like to pass a bible round at this point so the child holding the bible prays, although ensure they know that they can pass it on without saying anything. It is a good idea to start and end the time of prayer by praying yourself.

Finish

As the children go, leave them with the challenge:

- » Who could they say hello to before they go home that morning?



Youth Session

All-age worship

Introduction

These sessions are designed to complement the sermon outlines that are part of this resource. Because youth groups may meet during the week and may also hear the sermons, these sessions use different passages to explore the same themes in a way that is more relevant to young people.

Each session is divided into four sections: Welcome, Worship, Word, and Witness. This approach has been used to provide a simple structure which lends itself to involving young people in leading. With support, young people (especially older ones) can be encouraged to lead a section of the session; or the whole session could even be shared out amongst them. For this to happen it is worth planning ahead to think who can be asked and how they can be best supported to do their bit. It may be appropriate to meet with them in advance, or communicate in some way about what is required.

Another reason to plan ahead is in order to ensure you have the resources needed for the session. For example, this session requires a Jenga set and a bag of assorted rocks. You will also need a way to play video clips from the internet.

At the end of the session are a number of additional resources. There is a song suggestion (with YouTube link) and an optional movie clip for each session should these be appropriate. There are also some suggestions for making the sessions more active – particularly for younger groups or those who just enjoy more physicality.

Welcome

Play a game (or two or three!) of Jenga. When the tower tumbles at the end of the last game, leave the pieces in an untidy pile. Use this as a starting point for talking about the nature of church, including the fact that the term refers to the community of believers – not the building.

Questions could include the following:

- » In what ways is Jenga like church?
- » If the Jenga tower represents the church, where do you fit in to it and why?
- » Where do the minister / leadership fit?
- » How about the children?
- » How about adults?
- » How about the older members?
- » Do you think our church is stable or a bit wobbly and why?



Worship

Depending on the comments made in the last section, it may be good to introduce this section by saying something like: "We know our church isn't perfect and can be frustrating, but we're not here to moan about it! We can talk about how things could be better, but let's not lose sight of the good!"

Invite group members to take it in turns to pick up one of the scattered Jenga blocks and rebuild the tower. As each brick is laid down they are invited to say a simple sentence of something they want to thank God for, to do with the church. Encourage everyone to do this out loud if at all possible.

Finish off this section with a prayer thanking God for how his goodness is displayed in so many ways through the church. Leave the tower built up for the next section.

Word

Read 1 Peter 2:4-10

Ask:

- » What similarities do you see between Jenga and what's described in this passage?
- » What differences do you see?

Bring in a bag of rocks of varying shapes, sizes, colours, etc and empty it out onto the floor.

Draw attention to the fact that the 'living stones' described in the passage are more like the stones on the floor than the Jenga blocks.

Ask:

- » Why might this be?

Say: We are all unique, and the church is made up of unique individuals of all shapes and sizes. We are not meant to be like bricks!

Challenge the group to build the rocks into a pile like the Jenga blocks – supervise carefully to avoid the pile falling onto anyone, rocks being dropped on toes, etc!

Ask:

- » Why is it challenging to build with these stones?
- » What does this teach us about our church?
- » What would make it easier to build with these stones?
- » Why is the cornerstone important?
- » Who is the cornerstone?



Witness

Ask:

In the 'spiritual house' that is the church, what part do you play?

Are you an essential part of the structure or an extension built on the side?

How does this work for you individually or as a group?

How could things be improved so that the church becomes 'the people of God' (v10) rather than a loose collection of individuals/groups?

What might be the cement that makes it easier for it all to hold together?

Brainstorm ideas for how they think they could be a part of the on-going discussions, development and growth of your church.

Ask:

What is one purposeful step/action that, if taken, would help you to develop as an all-age church?

These ideas can be added to the wider church discussions taking place as part of the *Today...not tomorrow* process.

Finish by each selecting a rock and praying that God would help us to play our part as a living stone in his church. If possible, allow the young people to take their stone away with them to keep as a reminder that they are being built into a spiritual house along with everyone else who makes up the church.

Other resources:

Song: All To Us by Chris Tomlin - <http://youtu.be/riWye9M0L4E>

Movie Clip: Show the clip from *The Incredibles* where the family and Frozone work as a team to defeat the evil robot. Chapter 29, 1:33.06 to 1:37.48

For younger (or more active) groups:

Welcome: Split into two groups, each has a Jenga set. Empty the bricks at one end of the room and run a relay race (team members take it in turns to run and grab one brick before returning and adding it to the tower). First team to have a complete tower wins. Everyone could then play with the first set, and then play the second game with the other.

Word: Play games where the group need to build themselves into something, eg build a human pyramid (make sure great care is taken and safety precautions are in place), or divide into small groups who have to work as a team to represent different things – such as a car, a packet of crisps, toothpaste on a toothbrush, etc.

