

Wisdom cries out through children

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Most of my time and energy in children's ministry is spent incorporating children into the worshipping body of our church. I often say that our ministry tag line is something like "make them ministers." At the Methodist church where I pastor, children are ushers and acolytes. They serve communion, wash feet, and sing in choirs.

And at least once a month, a child takes her place in our pulpit to read scripture. There are many reasons I love these Sundays, but primary among them is that scripture sounds different when a child reads it. I'm also not afraid to put into the hands of a child the kinds of readings adults often try to protect children from:

How long, O simple ones, will you love being simple? How long will scoffers delight in their scoffing and fools hate knowledge?

Give heed to my reproof; I will pour out my thoughts to you; I will make my words known to you.

Because I have called and you refused, have stretched out my hand and no one heeded,

and because you have ignored all my counsel and would have none of my reproof,

I also will laugh at your calamity; I will mock when panic strikes you, when panic strikes you like a storm, and your calamity comes like a whirlwind, when distress and anguish come upon you.

I've heard children read Isaiah's condemnations of Israel. Some have memorized psalms or the Magnificat to bring into worship. But my favorite story is when Hannah told me that the Ten Commandments, her favorite passage in the Bible, would be the one she got to read on Sunday. On her appointed Sunday she turned to her mother, pointed to the pulpit, and said, "I have been waiting a long time to get up there."

Proverbs offers us a caution when we refuse to let Hannah speak: "For waywardness kills the simple, and the complacency of fools destroys them; but those who listen to me will be secure and will live at ease, without dread of disaster." In a child's mouth this proverb upends our assumptions about wisdom being tied to age, education, or class. Hannah's voice should be heard in worship--not because of her education or how old she is, but because of her earnest insistence that God can speak through her.

Children reading scripture is important for the body of Christ. We can forget that children see and understand more of the brokenness around them than we know. They too are the witnesses of violence, the ones who bear trauma in their bodies. When children participate in proclaiming the good news they are also the ones who receive it. "Wisdom cries out in the street; in the squares she raises her voice."