

Wondering with Children: Making Space for Growing in the Light

For Friends, *continuing revelation* has an important place in our journey of faith. As we live our lives and encounter new ideas, experiences and people, we are open to new truths that may be revealed to us. Our inner life grows as we explore with open hearts and minds. We grow in years; we grow in Light.

The practice of wondering about a story with children is similar, in that it makes space for children to explore the ideas and images, words and characters in a story from the particular perspective of that moment in their lives. Parents and those who work with children know how quickly children grow and shift in their perspectives. Each new experience brings with it new pieces to add to their worldview and inner life. Their connections to a story will change as they grow, and wondering allows their “answers” to change as well.

When we ask children to wonder about a story, we’re not asking them for a factual answer to a question. To wonder can also mean to speculate, to doubt, to question, to be unsure. It can also mean to be in awe or to marvel. We invite the children to do any of these things when we wonder together about the story we’ve just experienced. We make space for the idea that in a week, a month, a year, the children might experience something new in the story.

Some practical “tips:”

- ❖ When you finish the story and begin to ask the wondering questions, make sure your posture, face, and voice are open and welcoming. Your questions will sound more genuine and inviting to the children if you are wondering with them! Wondering is about authentic inquiry.
- ❖ Children who have not been asked to “wonder” before may be puzzled by this language. You might need to invite them into this experience very explicitly the first time(s) you do it: *“When we wonder, we’re sharing what we think, feel, or know about the story today. There isn’t one right or wrong answer. Let’s listen in our hearts.”* Wondering takes practice, both for us and for the children.
- ❖ Many Faith & Play stories begin with the wondering question, *“I wonder what part of the story you liked best?”* which is open and inviting. Children usually know what they liked in a story. Listen to responses and affirm them. Try to avoid comments like, “That’s right,” but instead reflect back what you heard. *“You liked the song they sang.” “The pictures were done in colors you like.”* Your

interest in what they have to say is a gift: you're telling the children that they are heard and valued.

- ❖ Use the story materials! If a child references a figure or piece in the story, listen to what they are wondering. They may appreciate you gesturing to or moving the piece, depending on what they are saying about it in the story.
- ❖ If a child asks a question that you cannot answer, or you don't feel comfortable inserting your ideas, you can simply state, "I wonder." This simple response is a cue to the children that you, too, are on a journey of discovery.
- ❖ Don't be discouraged if children do not respond verbally to a question. Being comfortable with silence is another practice we can model, and it is a valuable lesson for our youngest Friends. We can't know how the words and images of the story are moving within the children. Allow them space to wonder inwardly.
- ❖ As children grow used to wondering questions, they may begin to create their own. Honor and explore their questions. These additions are what wondering is all about: the children's individual and gathered experience of the story as it intersects with their own lives at that moment.

Wondering About God:

How do we enter into conversation with our children about God? What do we have to teach them, and how can we remain open to what they will teach us? Children are neither empty vessels waiting to be filled, or blank canvases ready to be given shape and color. We do not need to fill them with knowledge and information about God; they come to us full of knowing, and of Light. Children are vibrantly alive and full of light, hope and love. In this same way, silence is not empty, but full.

We make space for children to experience words, images, and silence – all three are tools for them to know their inner experience of the Spirit, God, the Divine. Story is often the vehicle for their work, but children don't always need words. They can teach us a lot about space and silence. What is our role as parents, caregivers, teachers in helping them to come close to God and God to come close to them, for them to know that place deep within themselves where they are at home with God and God is at home with them?

One possibility is for us to wonder with them, and be on the journey with them.

- *I wonder where God was in your day?*
- *I wonder when you've seen God in another person?*
- *I wonder how we look for God in that experience?*
- *I wonder where we see/hear/feel God?*