KIDS ASK THE DARNDEST THINGS

Remember the old Art Linkletter TV show, *Kids Say the Darndest Things*?

If you’ve seen one of my Children’s Messages, you know that’s true.
And if you’ve raised kids or been around kids for any length of time, you know that they can also ask the darndest questions, can’t they?

In one of the previous churches I was the minister of, I was in the sanctuary getting ready for the worship service and a young boy who had come to church with his mother walked up to me and asked, with total sincerity, “Are you God?”

For just a brief second I flirted with the idea of playing with that kid’s head.

“Yes, I am. How did you know?”

But I didn’t.

Here are some other actual questions kids asked.

A young girl asked her mother, “Why do adult butts move so much when mine stays in one place?”

A young boy watching his father eat his dinner had a question/comment for him when he asked, “Daddy, did you know that if you put that much salad dressing on a salad it’s really not a salad anymore?”

A youngster was riding along in the car with his parents and they drove past a church with a giant crucifix on the front lawn. And he asked them, “Who is that guy hanging up there, anyway? I see him around all over the place. Why don’t they put him inside?”

I’d like to ask any parents or grandparents, or those who taught Sunday School this year or in past years, if you can recall a memorable question that a youngster asked. If you can, would you share it with us?

[People respond?]

This morning I’m going to read a story, written by a rabbi named Marc Gellman, called, *Does God Have a Big Toe?* I got the story from a book by the same name that Rabbi Gellman published a while back.

*Does God Have a Big Toe?* is the untold story behind the story of the Tower of Babel. We heard the Bible version a little while ago, which Terri
Brown read from the book of Genesis; but I’ll bet you didn’t know that the whole Tower of Babel incident began innocently enough with a child’s question. Here’s what happened.

Long ago, all the people of the world lived in one place called “Babel.” Not only did every person live in the same place, but every person spoke the same language. All of which made life very easy. Getting the news was easy, and you didn’t have to learn a new language in high school.

Arinna asked, “Mommy, I have a big toe, and you have a big toe, and Daddy has a big toe. Does God have a big toe too?”

Now, everything might have been all right if Arinna’s mother had just said, “Arinna, God is not a person. God is special and invisible and wonderful and God is the creator of the universe. God has made each of us in His image. But God is not a person. And that is why God does not have a big toe.”

But Arinna’s mother was busy with something and said, “Go ask your father.”

So she did, but Arinna’s father was also busy with something and he told her, “Go ask your grandpa.” So she did.

Grandpa was in his garden, digging up weeds with his pal Fred (by the way, I did not make that up!), who worked in the king’s palace.

Arinna asked, “Grandpa, I have a big toe and Mommy has a big toe and Daddy has a big toe and you have a big toe and Fred has a big toe. Does God have a big toe, too?”

Now, Arinna’s grandpa was old, and a little hard of hearing, and he said, “Does God have a big hoe? Why, I don’t know if God has a big hoe. I suppose if God has a garden, then God must have a big hoe. After all, you can’t get rid of weeds without a hoe.”

Fred overheard the question, and he whispered to Arinna that tomorrow when he went back to work at the palace he would ask the king if God had a big toe.

Fred asked the king the next day, and the king thought and thought and then issued a proclamation.

“You, the people of Babel, will build a tower up to the sky so that I, your king, can stand on top of this tower and look at God’s foot. Then I will tell you if God has a big toe.”

The king ordered the builders to use only the best bricks and the best tar to stick them together. The Tower of Babel grew higher and higher every day.

Now, God knew that if everybody was working on the tower, then nobody would work in the fields growing things. Nobody would be in the
shops making things. God knew that soon all the bricks and tar in Babel would be used up. And the people of Babel would have nothing left to build houses.

God thought about knocking down the tower, but God knew for sure that the Babelians would just build it up again to see if God had a big toe. There was only one thing to do.

The next day, when Arinna came to watch the work on the tower, she heard Fred ask his friend for a brick, and his friend answered, “Mah atah rotzeh?” and looked at a fellow with a wheelbarrow who said, “Gesundheit.”

People didn’t know what other people were saying, which made them very frustrated, and soon bricks and tar were flying everywhere, and by the end of the day those who spoke the same language were heading out of town together. Arinna and her family decided to leave town too—with Fred, grandpa, and a few other people they could still understand. They packed up everything they owned and left Babel.

On the cart, Arinna was quiet for a while and then asked, “Mommy, I have a belly button, and you have a belly button, and Daddy has a belly button. Does God have a belly button too?”

I don’t know if any Sunday School kid in our church ever asked his or her Sunday School teacher if God has a big toe or a belly button. But I’m sure they asked lots of questions. Good questions. Sincere questions. Even profound questions. About God. About Jesus. About the Bible stories they were read.

And that’s why we have a Sunday School. So the children in our church who are growing up in the Christian faith can have a safe place to learn and explore and find some answers to their inquiries. Or at least learn how they might find some answers for themselves.

I’ve heard a good deal of lamenting and agonizing about our shrinking Sunday School. I’ve even done some lamenting myself, actually. We don’t have the numbers of children we used to have. We don’t have as many young families with kids walking through our doors. We struggle to find Sunday School teachers and Christian Education leaders to make our Sunday School better and stronger.

So we adults also have questions we’re asking ourselves and each other, and sharing concerns about our church that trouble us.

Questions and concerns such as: Where are the young families and the kids? Why aren’t they coming? And how can we get them to discover us, draw them into our congregation and encourage them to be a part of this wonderful faith community?

Those are tough, unpleasant questions; but we need to ask them and
try to come up with good answers if we hope to meet the significant needs and challenges our church faces.

Fortunately, we’re in the faith business. We believe in the power of the Holy Spirit to blow through this place and stir us to find solutions. We trust that God isn’t finished with us yet, and that the risen Christ is in our midst and will not abandon us as we strive to forge ahead into the future God has planned.

You know, I’m still excited about the Annual Meeting of our church we had three weeks ago. Those in attendance had a calm, rational, fruitful conversation about some tough and sobering subjects. We discussed things that weren’t easy to talk about.

Things such as, after years of passing budgets with significant deficits, how do we fix the problem? Do we bite the bullet and sell off some of our property? Should we make staff cuts that will save money but weaken our music program?

We had a healthy conversation about some hard, difficult choices that we need to consider. But you know what? After that conversation, I felt something positive come out of it. And I truly believe it was the Holy Spirit lighting a fire under us. Because after the meeting, I overheard different conversations about having fundraisers and fun-raisers, and holding church activities outside of our church that will raise awareness about our church in the community.

And I believe that, when people outside these walls discover us, see what the First Congregational Church of Scarborough is all about and get to know the loving, caring people that make up our congregation, we will draw new blood and bring in young families with kids who ask questions like, “Does God have a big toe?” And that will help to grow our Sunday School and insure a brighter future for us.

You will be hearing about some of these community-type church events very soon. I think you’re going to like them, and I hope you’ll want to be involved in them. But in the meantime, as we seek God’s guidance together and do what we can to help our church remain strong and vibrant, I pray that we will all stay involved, get more involved or begin to get involved in the life of our church.

The kids in our church have many questions they want to ask, about God, about Jesus, and about the Christian faith. And all of us want this church to be here to help answer their questions.

So I encourage you to help or continue helping the Ministry of Christian Education and our Sunday School program. Offer your support
to Janet and Kathy and Laura and Mardi and Karen by volunteering. Help Penny van Dyne with nursery coverage. Sign up to teach. Go on the Christian Education ministry and bring some new blood and new ideas into the mix.

The children in our church are precious, and we want to give them a firm foundation upon which to build their Christian faith so that, if they ask a question like, “Does God have a big toe?” we can help answer their question, or give them the tools they need to find the answer for themselves.

On this Children’s Sunday, may God bless our church’s kids, and our Christian Education leaders, teachers and volunteers as we end another year of Sunday School and look ahead with hope and faith to a new and even better year next fall. Amen.