
Children Who Know Jesus

**An article from the *Cathedral Times*
by the Very Reverend Samuel G. Candler,
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Two of our wonderful parents at the Cathedral of St. Philip were listening closely this past Sunday. It goes without saying, I hope, that they were listening during the service, and during the Dean's Forum class!

However, they were also listening to their children. Now, I believe our children's program is one of the best in the country, and I am delighted by what goes on in children's classes Sunday after Sunday. Mary Hunter Strange, our Director of Children's Ministries, does an outstanding job; and she depends upon a great company of faithful volunteer teachers. The teachers of our children are us! Our teachers are faithful volunteers with children and obligations and frantic Sunday mornings of their own. Thanks to them!

However, no matter what we actually say when we teach, our students sometimes hear things a bit differently. Like us, they filter the teacher's careful comments through their own contexts, and through their own hopes and anxieties.

So, on this past Sunday, a father and mother went to retrieve their four-year-old daughter and asked her, naturally, about her class. The young daughter replied, "It was great, but I learned when Jesus was a child some people wanted to kill him."

Yes, Jesus was a child at one point in his life. It is fun to teach this to children, who relate almost automatically. But, yes, later in his life—"much later"—some people wanted to kill him. Every teacher has his or her own way of covering that situation, especially when talking to young children.

That mother and father's story reminded me of my own story, at a time when I was teaching five-year-olds at a wonderful Anglo-Catholic parish in New Haven, Connecticut. One of our practices was simply to walk children through the beautifully adorned church and use the stained glass windows and statues to tell the biblical stories. We were talking about the good shepherd one morning, when a young girl pointed to a crucifix.

"Who's that?" she asked. "Well, that's Jesus," I replied gently. My little student was sincerely puzzled. "That's not Jesus," she said firmly. I followed up by saying, ever so carefully, "Well, that's Jesus when he died." To which the young girl ended the conversation by concluding, "No, that's not Jesus. Jesus is a little baby."

Of course Jesus is a baby and a little child. Jesus is especially that to young children. Children relate to Jesus when they know he is one of them. It is only as we grow older that we relate to the other features of Jesus' life, especially his suffering and death. We need both those relationships.

Our faith becomes more and more complete when we listen to the story of Jesus with a mind to how that story intersects with our own stories. In our best moments of faith, God gives us grace to relate our lives to the life and ministry of Jesus. When children know Jesus, they know that he cares for them so much that he is one of them. When adults know Jesus, they know that he cares for them so much that he is one of them. There is nothing contradictory about that.

One more thing. My friends, the mother and father who told me this story this past Sunday, said that their daughter said

one more thing. As they were in the Atrium, getting ready to go home, the daughter looked around and said, "You know, this place is pretty much all about God and Jesus."

Yes, that's it! And us. This place is about God and Jesus and Us, over and over again, from generation to generation, and through every year of our lives.

Sam Candler signature



The Very Rev. Sam Candler

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