

A Few Notes from Vacation Bible School

Think of the church year: Advent, Christmas, Epiphany, Lent, Easter, Pentecost.

During what time in the year do you think we have the most non-members enter through our doors?

It doesn't happen on Christmas or Easter.

It doesn't even happen because of any particular season in the church year.

When do we have the greatest single opportunity to reach out to the unchurched, *without even having to leave the property?*

Vacation Bible School is perhaps the largest outreach ministry Martin Luther Lutheran church engages in every year. All we do is advertise (on the radio, public access TV, put up a few signs throughout town) and they come to us! For one week out of the summer, we have between 50 and 100 kids join us, for morning sessions of Bible lessons, praise music, fellowship, games, crafts and snacks.

It takes a lot to put on a good VBS. It takes talented and willing volunteers. It takes quite a bit of planning and logistics. It takes a chunk out of the church's budget. It takes hefty doses of prayer.

Six months ago, when we were sitting down to plan this year's VBS, we started by asking ourselves what we wanted to accomplish. One of the best ways to figure out how to get from A to B is to consider what B is, or as Steven Covey puts it, "begin with the end in mind." When we see 60 plus kids, from preschool age up to 6th grade walk through our doors, what do we want to do with them? What do we want to see when they exit those doors? What do we want for the ones who are members here; what do we want for the ones who may never be back this way again?

It's God who does the work. It's God who saves.

That means it's not our job to be sure each person makes their own individual choice to be saved. What our job is, is two things: Firstly, we want to create the best circumstances possible for the Holy Spirit to do his thing. Secondly, we want people to leave with a lasting memory of whatever significant experience or experiences they have had.

The kids who came to VBS do have different backgrounds. Some of them were born under better circumstances than others; some may have experienced neglect or abuse, but in all cases, these kids haven't been around long enough to become loaded down with sinful baggage that adults deal with.

Yet, someday - it could be this year, it could be a dozen years from now, it could even be on their deathbed - Jesus is going to come into their life and offer his forgiveness. And they are going to need it. And probably by then these VBS kids will have more of a background in sin. Maybe they'll be incredible sinners, maybe they'll be run of the mill sinners. Regardless, ***they will all need Christ's forgiveness.***

Most of us can look back on our lives and see times when we got entangled by sin and the result was nothing but trouble and suffering for ourselves and our loved ones. Fortunately, we've had pastors and teachers and mentors and parents and friends who have been there for us, reminding us of Jesus' words, "your faith has saved you; go in peace." All along our path, God has used these people to create the best possible circumstances for his Spirit to work in our lives. And each week, Christ comes to us in word and sacrament to remind us of his forgiveness. We have had many many very easily forgettable experiences in our lives, but it only takes one or two of lasting impression to trigger that connection between our heads and our hearts that the Holy Spirit is looking for.

In planning for a successful VBS week, knowing Christ has forgiven a multitude of sins for us, we unashamedly did some pretty crazy things to share our love for Jesus with the kids. Hopefully we did as little hindering as possible, so the Holy Spirit could do the work. Hopefully the kids left here with a handful of memories, or even just one really lasting one, that will remind them of what they learned at VBS.

In some way, large or small, each one of you were part of this valuable outreach. Whether it was your prayers, or change you threw in the offering plate, or whether you volunteered or got someone else to volunteer, you were a part of something that will have eternal ramifications for at least 61 souls.

Many hearty thanks go out to the brave landlubbers who hopped aboard this year's high seas expedition. For five days straight, our crew journeyed together past the islands of doubt, through the straits of uncertainty, toward the far shore of faith. The treasure we found was stowed away in our hearts, and the Bible mapped the way there. Friends were made and prayers were prayed. No one got voted off our island, no sir! The only passenger we had no room for on our ship was Doubt!

Praise be to God for working through you to bless the lives of these children. May God bless all who were a part of this year's outreach to the youth in our community, and may he bless the young ones who came to enjoy VBS with us.

- Ryan Grube