

Children and Mission by Mark Norridge

After a recent Friday club during our "Space" theme, Alex [not his real name], aged 10, stopped for a moment to speak to me. During the evening he had stunned everyone with his amazing knowledge of Space, as we had explored the vastness of the universe and of God. "I know what heaven is like as well", he said. Not quite sure what to expect, I responded "Oh ... really!". "Yes", he said, "it has walls of Jasper, gates of emeralds, and roads paved with gold. I think silver makes the white lines. I read it in the bible". I was blown away by this small encounter. Casper was recently diagnosed with mild Aspergers Syndrome, he gets into all sorts of trouble, winding up others and himself. He is from a family with no church background, but here he was caught by a vision that connects with his imagination. An imagination that we can encourage and feed in our Friday Kids Club, called JFC.

Surveys tell us that during the 20th Century the number of children going to Sunday School attendance in the UK has dropped from 55% to 4%. The Sunday School Movement had a profound effect on our nation, educating all classes of children in the bible and giving them a Christian view of the world. This provided a framework for life, informing values and therefore affecting the whole of society, as well as the individual's knowledge of God. What now informs the imaginations of our nation's children? What now fills the gap in forming children's values and belief systems?

Our Friday club attracts 50 children aged 5-11 who have no other contact with church. Through a combination of team games, craft activities, fun learning, relationship and messy games we seek to create an environment of acceptance, challenge, consideration for others and seeing the world in the context of Jesus. Through a relational approach we take advantage of fantastic opportunities to engage with the lives of the families. Recently we have set up a young leader scheme to give a role for the teenagers who still come along, and have seen them join a youth Alpha course.

Reaching out to children is a long term strategy. It includes individuals finding Jesus personally now and in the future, but is also a strategy of cultural transformation looking forward 20-30 years. Like the powerful impact of the Sunday School Movement, reaching children through clubs and activity groups is a way of providing a new generation with the ability to see the world in the context of Jesus for a new century.

Bio

Mark and Maddy Norridge have three boys, Jack, Reuben and Asher and are leading an innovative and experimenting church plant in Northampton.