Time to Worship

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I put on the pink and yellow flowered dress and looked at my scowling face in the mirror. "I hate dresses," I reminded my mom as she walked into the bathroom.

“Well, we are going to church. You have to look nice.” She picked up the comb and began tearing through my snarled hair. My head was jerked back and forth with each tug.

I grit my teeth together, hoping that she would stop soon.

“My goodness, what a mess.”

That was not a good sign. I knew complaining would not work. I tried that many times, but the result was always more painful pulling at my hair. I could hear some of the roots being torn from my scalp. Heaven forbid I go to church with a tangle in my hair. Finally the comb began to glide smoothly without painful interruptions. A big yellow bow was fastened on top of my head. My mom then used her fingers to put each misbehaving hair into position. Satisfied with her masterpiece, she bent down and pulled up my knee socks.

"Okay, get your shoes."

I went to my closet and sighed as I pulled the dreaded white Sunday shoes out from under my baseball glove and butterfly net. I squeezed my feet inside and hobbled into the kitchen.

"C'mon now, walk straight," Mom said as she cleaned her glasses with a dish towel above the sink.

"But these shoes hurt my feet," I complained.

"Come here." Mom bent down and wiped off some syrup from the corners of my mouth with her finger. She then looked me over one last time. I passed Sunday morning inspection. "Okay, now I hope you went to the bathroom because you're not getting up once we sit down this week."

"Ready to go?" asked my dad as he jingled the car keys. We piled into the car and were off to church. We parked our clean car next to the other cars that had gone through the car wash the night before. We then followed the usher single file and took our seats.

The hard wood bench was cold on my bare legs. I examined a scrape on my knee that I had gotten when I fell off my bike. The clean pink area where the Band-Aid had once been was still visible. The temptation to pick at the scab was unbearable, so I stuck both hands under my knees and began to swing my legs.

I looked around the church and saw my friend, Melissa, a few rows back. She caught my eye and waved. I waved back and then we both started laughing.
I felt a sharp nudge in my side. I looked up to see my mom's stern face. She lowered her eyebrows and silently shook her head. She turned away and continued to read her bulletin.

I cautiously slipped another look at Melissa. She was still laughing and her face was turning red. I felt the uncontrollable urge to laugh. My stomach began to hurt and my cheeks were hot. I grabbed my mouth with my hands and my body began to shake. I felt the tears running down my face. I had to breathe! But I knew that taking a breath could mean disaster if done wrong. So I began to concentrate only on the breath. "Don't laugh, don't laugh," I thought to myself. Slowly I drew in the holy air and it filled my lungs. What was so funny, anyway? I wondered why it was wrong to laugh in church and why it was so quiet. I decided then not to look at Melissa again during the service.

The organ stopped playing, and the man with black hair, glasses, and a tie stepped behind the wooden box with the microphone. We rose to our feet and he lifted his hands high in the air and gave us God's greeting. The people then turned pages in the Psalter hymnal as music began to play. I stuck my finger in my ear and noticed that it made the people's voices muffled and distant. I tried it with both ears. Then I pulled my fingers in and out of my ears. I smiled, "Wow, what a cool sound." I tugged at my mom's sleeve. "Mom, listen," I said as I continued my new trick.

She bent down and put her hand on my neck and squeezed. My shoulders went up to try to relieve the pressure and I opened my mouth in a silent scream. She then whispered something loudly in my ear. I guess she didn't like my discovery.

We took our seats again and the minister began his long sermon of "thou's" and "thee's." I squirmed in my seat. How come that clock is moving so slow? I put my feet up on the pew in front of me. I felt a pinch on my arm and I put my feet down. I sat Indian style. Then I drew both legs up and placed my chin on my knees. Then I returned to Indian style.

"Sit still," my mom said under her breath.

I watched as a tray of bread passed before me. I felt my stomach talking. Why can't I have one? My mom cradled the bread softly in her hands.

"Take, eat, remember and believe....," the minister's deep voice said as I solemnly slipped a peppermint in my mouth. "I have to go to the bathroom, Mom."

"What did I tell you before we left?" was her reply.

A lady in a bright red dress walked to the front of the church and picked up a microphone. Her hair was big and puffy and it sat on the top of her head. She began to sing in a shrill voice. The notes jumped up and down and I thought the stained-glass windows were going to shatter into a million pieces. I felt the laugh return. I imagined what Melissa was doing behind me and I didn't look. I covered both ears with my hands. I felt the stinging pinch of my mom's fingers on my upper arm. It was not a normal pinch; it was more...
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like a pinch and twist. She meant business. The pain in my arm kept the laughter inside. Finally the lady returned to her seat and I could breathe normally again.

The service was almost over. A collection plate was handed to me and I happily dropped in my sweaty quarter. At the final "Amen" I sprang to my feet and dashed through the huge wooden doors. I grabbed a stale cookie and some juice from the smiling ladies on the church lawn.

The yellow bow was out of my hair before we pulled into our driveway. My shoes were left in the front hall and my dress lay in a heap on my bedroom floor. I went outside to play before Sunday dinner. I watched a robin searching for its breakfast. I watched a butterfly gently make its way over to a bright yellow flower. I saw the corn sway in the breeze. I closely examined a pine cone that had just fallen from a tree. I felt the prickly edges on the outside and the smooth grooves inside. I could smell the freshness of late spring in the warm air. I walked through the garden with my bare feet and felt the cool, soft dirt between my toes. I saw God in the clear water that was trickling over the beautiful rocks in the stream. I heard Him in a low hum from the bugs that were jumping in and out of the tall grassy field. I felt Him as the sun kissed my rosy cheeks.

I was enjoying life and enjoying the simple gifts God gave me. Jesus said, “Let the little children come to me, for the kingdom of God belongs to such as these.” I came to Him with bare feet, cut off jeans, and tangled hair. I understood Him as I climbed the tall trees in my backyard and as I watched the stars twinkle in the night.