The Altogether Christian
Children's Time

Foundational Practice from *The Spiritual Child: Educating the Mind and the Heart* by Lisa Miller

In this very uplifting account, Miller makes the point that the experience(s) of unconditional love builds faith and sets an individual up to be more resilient for times of challenge.

Below is a summary of Miller's meditation:
1) First take a series of breaths to calm yourself.
2) See yourself at a table. (*In our case we are using a picnic blanket.)* Around the table (*blanket*) you have invited people who love you just as you are without judgment. See their faces, remember their imprint on you.
3) Choose your word for the Holy One who joins you now at your table (*blanket*). Rest in their collective affirmations and celebrate.
4) Pause and listen for the word(s) they are saying to you.

You will notice a series of scripts cumulatively called **"Jesus All-Together Picnic."** This is the time in worship when you would invite the children in your midst to come forward and join your children's ministry leader(s) or the pastor for a few minutes of discussion and imaginative play. We have developed scripts to help guide your introduction of each weekly character. You will see that the scripts recommend having two leaders, a "dynamic duo" to share the dialogue.

Adapt any of these suggestions to fit the way you would express the ideas in the scripts. You don't have to read it word-for-word; you can also just "get the gist" and express it in your own way. You have our encouragement and permission to do so. Have fun each week!

Some notes before the scripts:

We have created full scripts for your children's time in worship based on the themes in The Altogether Christian worship series from The Florida Annual Conference of The United Methodist Church. We leaned more into the "picnic" with various characters in the bible (those who display all-together heart, soul, mind, strength and love). We have suggested using modified lyrics from "Almost Persuaded", #2235 in The Faith We Sing as a song to bring the children up and back to their seats. This option is likely easier for your live musicians to do. Choose what works best for your context. This is one of those "adapt as you need to" examples!

Each week you will need a picnic blanket and a basket of some sort. The blanket could change over the course of the series, or you could ask different members of your congregation to share their favorite picnic blanket for use during the children's time.

The basket can be used to carry weekly props, which vary depending on the biblical character and theme we are exploring. Within the scripts you will see when and what to pull from the basket to enhance the experience. This also builds intrigue as the children 'wait' to see what is in the basket each week.

SUGGESTED SUPPLIES

WEEK 5 - An All-Together Love

One or more blankets in a laundry or wicker basket
Picnic basket
Props from previous four weeks
Bible

Week Five: Your people will be my people.

(Ruth & An All-Together Love)

Ruth 1:16c

Check the Suggested Supplies list to make sure you have everything you need. Invite the children to come forward. You could sing this version of "Almost Persuaded", #2235 in The Faith We Sing:

Jesus invites you here, angels are ling'ring near,
prayers rise from hearts so dear; O children, come!

*Depending on how many children you usually have, have a blanket or blankets so that there is room for everyone to have a seat, **plus empty spaces**. Don't lay the blanket/s out in advance, let the children help do it. Have fun!*

Leader 1: Welcome, friends! If this is your first time visiting our church, we're so happy you're here! For those of you who are joining us online, we're so happy that you're here too!

Leader 2: Wow… we have had so many great Jesus All-Together picnics! Let's all lay out the blanket/s and enjoy one last imaginary picnic with Jesus and other dear family and friends. Children at home, you can sit on a cushion or a blanket and join the picnic too! *[help the children lay out the blanket/s and find a seat.]*

Leader 1: Over the past four weeks we have imagined these picnics filled with people who love us. Each week we gathered on this/these blanket/s and learned about different bible characters. There was the story of young David and his heart for God. *[lay out pictures from week one]* There was Deery who taught about our soul's thirst for God. *[Set out the plant* There was Solomon whose mind was for God *[lay out the giant question mark or the question mark crown]* There was the promise of the Holy Spirit for everyone. *[lay out the ring]*

Leader 2: Today we have one more character to meet. Her name is Ruth and Ruth has an amazing story. Are you ready to hear about Ruth?

Leader 1: OK… here we go. We have to go all the way back to the Old Testament. *[pull out the bible and turn to Ruth 1]*

Leader 2: Oh! Do you think we should imagine Ruth at our picnic?

Leader 1: Yes, I do, because Ruth's story will teach us about widening our circle to love ALL people.

Leader 2: Oh, oh! I know a song about that! It goes like this, *[singing]*"*...draw the circle, draw the circle wide. Draw the circle, draw the circle wide. No one stands along, we stand side by side*…." (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uL-cvypTGfk)

Leader 1: [interrupting the singing] Yes! Yes! That's perfect! It describes Ruth's story of drawing a wider circle of people she loved and people who loved her.

Leader 2: Oooo! This sounds like a good story. Children, do you want to hear more? *[allow the children to respond]*

Leader 1: Okay! Once upon a time in a land far away, a land called Moab, there was a great famine. There was no food in the land and many people died or left.
Ruth and her sister were both married, but both of their husbands died. And their father-in-law died too. So their mother-in-law, Naomi, who had lost her two sons and her husband, decided to leave Moab.

Leader 2: [sniffling, with tissue in hand] Oh, that is SO sad! Naomi had so much loss! And her daughters-in-law too. They must have felt so, so sad!

Leader 1: I agree! But, when Naomi decided to leave, the two sisters started to leave with her, Ruth and her sister, Orpah. But soon Orpah went back to her home, while Ruth insisted on going with Naomi.

Leader 2: I think that Ruth would most likely miss her sister, Orpah. I think that if Ruth were to go home to her mother and father and her other siblings, they would help her feel better in her sadness.

Leader 1: Yes, I think that may be true. But Ruth didn't go home. Ruth stayed with Naomi and returned to Naomi's home. Ruth made Naomi's family her family. In the bible, Ruth says to Naomi, "Do not press me to leave you, to turn back from following you! Where you go, I will go; where you lodge, I will lodge; your people shall be my people and your God my God."

Leader 2: You know what? Ruth's words are bringing a very beautiful thought to my mind. I imagine that when Ruth and Naomi were in Moab they needed only *one* blanket to have an All-Together picnic there. But when they went to Naomi's homeland, they needed *many more blankets* to have an All-Together picnic there.

Leader 1: That's a powerful image.

Leader 2: Yes, I can see the picnic getting bigger and bigger…. And I can hear the singing, 'Draw the circle, draw the circle wide….'

Leader 1: I see it too, and I hear it too: A picnic that grows big enough to share love with all people, no matter who they are or where they are.

Leader 2: And then like Ruth, we too can say to anyone, anywhere: your people are my people, and your God is my God.

Leader 1: We're going to need some more blankets!

Leader 2: We're going to need some more blankets! Let's pray together. '*Hey God, thank you for the story of Ruth and Naomi. Thank you for a heart to love you. Thank you for a heart to love others. In Jesus' name. Amen.*' Now will you help put up the blanket/s? *[allow the children to pile the blankets into a basket]*

[While the musician/s play 'Almost Persuaded',
dismiss the children to where they will go next]