



**Mennonite
Church
Canada**

Resource Centre

Keeping Your Eye on the Ball

Children's Story

Cycle A, Proper 25

Title:	Keeping Your Eye on the Ball
Author:	Harold Schilk
Church:	Lethbridge Mennonite Church, Alberta
Text:	Matthew 22:34-46
Theme:	What does it mean to concentrate on loving God with all that you are?
Needed:	A sponge ball and bat (plastic is good) and a Bible

Wondering Questions:

- I wonder why people wanted to trick Jesus with hard questions.
- I wonder what games Jesus played as a child, and what he had to keep his eye on.
- I wonder how we can stay focused on loving God and our neighbours.

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Gathering Activity:

Hold the bat and ball in your hands as you welcome the children to this special part of the worship service for children but don't say anything about the ball and bat. Engage them in a short conversation about things that are happening in your church community and then say, "I notice that you have been keeping your eyes on my ball and bat, and that is very good, because today's children's story is called "Keeping Your Eye on the Ball." This might surprise you because ball games aren't mentioned in the Bible, and this story time is there to help you understand one of today's Bible readings. What is important in our Bible reading today is a skill that's also very important in baseball. So let's imagine ourselves onto the laps of Jesus' disciples as they listened to Jesus, the best teacher of all, and see what we can learn from Jesus today. If they had played ball in Jesus' neighbourhood, I think Jesus might have explained the importance of keeping your eye on the ball something like this."

Object Lesson:

In the sport of baseball batters are told to keep their eyes on the ball. That means they are supposed to watch the ball. They aim their attention at the thing they want to make contact with – the ball. *(Show the children a few practice hits by throwing up the ball and lightly bunting the ball. At first hit the ball. Later try looking away from the ball - at people in the congregation, at the back of the church and note how you are likely to miss making contact.)* Ask the children, “Why am I not able to hit the ball when I am looking away but able to hit it when I look at it?” *(Answer: because it is hard to get something unless you aim for it)*

Story:

One day some people wanted to trick Jesus. Just like in last week’s story, they tried to give him a hard question that he wouldn’t be able to answer. They asked him: “...which commandment in the law is the greatest?” Now this was like asking someone “what is the best sport to play?” There are many different opinions on that. If someone were to say one sport, others would disagree and then a very vigorous debate could take place. *(You could ask the children what their opinion is of which is the best sport, but be careful, pandemonium could ensue!)*

But Jesus had the perfect answer to this hard question about what the greatest commandment is. I’ll read what he said from my Bible. Jesus said: “ ‘You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind.’ This is the greatest and first commandment. And a second is like it: ‘You shall love your neighbour as yourself.’ On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets.” *(Matthew 22:37-40 NRSV)*

This answer was like answering the “what is the best sport?” question with: “the sport that makes you healthy and gives you the most pleasure.” Making people healthy and giving them pleasure is the main aim of sports. That would be hard to deny. Likewise, the greatest purpose of the commandments is to help us love God and each other better. That would be hard to deny. When we keep our eyes focused on loving God and neighbours as ourselves, we can make wonderful contact. That’s the skill of “keeping your eye on the ball” we want to remember from this story. Just like a batter can hit the ball when she stays focused on it, we can live in tune with the commandments when we love God and our neighbours as ourselves. With that answer, Jesus hit one right out of the ballpark!

Prayer:

Thank you, Jesus, for your smart answer about the most important commandment or rule. Please help us stay focused on loving you and our neighbours as ourselves when we wonder about what is most important. Amen.