

Buckingham's First Day of Sunday School

Saturday night seemed a little different around the household. Buckingham the Teddy Bear was not quite sure what was different, but he could sense that something was changing. He was sitting with his stuffed animal friends in the bedroom of Samantha, the little girl he was living with. They were waiting for Samantha to come to bed. She came into the room and instead of getting right into bed she picked Buckingham up and swung him around.

“Buckingham!” said Samantha, “Tomorrow we are going to church and mom and dad say I will get to go to Sunday School.”

Buckingham was a little puzzled. He was used to Samantha going to school on Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday and Friday, but he had never heard of going to school on a Sunday! It seemed as though Samantha could feel his confusion, for she sat him down and explained.

“Mom says Sunday School is a special part of church where I will talk about things that make me happy and sad, and find out ways to be the best person I can be. She says I will do lots of fun things, hear stories and sing songs and that best of all – there is no homework!”

Buckingham felt happy for Samantha. He could tell she was excited, but he was also a little sad. This meant that there would be one more day that she had to leave him behind. He was not allowed to go to school with her on Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday and Friday.

“Oh, and Buckingham, I almost forgot to tell you. Dad said it is okay if I bring you! You get to come with us. I want to pick out what I am going to wear tomorrow and then get in bed. You better lay down too, Buckingham. You don't want to be a sleepy head bear in the morning.”

Samantha picked out the clothes she planned to wear to church and got herself ready for bed. She snuggled up with Buckingham and called down to her parents who came and gave her a kiss goodnight and patted Buckingham on the head.

It was a little hard for Buckingham to get to sleep. He was very excited that he got to go with Samantha, but he was also a little unsure – what did this church look like? What if no one talked to him and Samantha? What if he did something wrong? What if Samantha's dad was wrong and Teddy Bears were not allowed? These and other questions kept going through Buckingham's mind. Finally, he made himself think about the nice walk he had been on that day and, finding that relaxing, he drifted off to sleep.

The next morning everyone got ready to go to church. After Samantha put on the outfit she had chosen, she found a bandana and tied it around Buckingham's neck so he would look extra fancy for church.

The family pulled up to the church in their car. This church was old. It had big thick stones. Buckingham thought it looked a little bit like a castle. He kind of liked that.

As they walked through the parking lot, Buckingham was still a little nervous. He wanted to come, but he was just not sure what to expect. He thought Samantha might be feeling the same way. She seemed to be holding him a little tighter than usual.

Before they got to the front door, Buckingham noticed that other children were carrying Teddy Bears and other stuffed animals. Buckingham was relieved to see the other animals. He realized that Samantha's dad was right and that Teddy Bears were welcome.

Once inside the church, the family was greeted by several people. They asked Samantha what her Teddy Bear's name was and said hi to Buckingham. Samantha's family got to see her classroom and meet her teachers. They seemed very nice. Then everyone went to church, even Buckingham.

The seats in the church were long benches made of wood. Samantha's mom said they were called pews. Buckingham did not think that they were very comfortable.

Samantha's dad had a piece of paper called an Order of Service. He showed it to her and explained that it listed all the things that would happen in the church worship service. The service would begin with a piece of music called a prelude. And just as he said that, the music began to play.

When the music ended, a woman stood up and welcomed everyone to church. She was the minister who would lead the worship service. She invited everyone to turn to their neighbor and say hello. She added one thing that really surprised Buckingham. She told everyone to be sure to welcome all the Teddy Bears and other stuffed animals that morning. She said, "Teddy Bears and friends are special ambassadors of kindness, warmth and good cheer and we are blessed to have them with us this morning."

Buckingham was not sure what an ambassador was, but it sounded good and it was fun having so many people say hello to him.

After the greetings, the people in church sang a song, a candle was lit in what was called a chalice, and the minister told a story. Then the children went to their classes. The teachers showed everyone where to go.

Samantha's teachers were Miss Lisa and Mr. Steve. They asked all the children to sit in a circle on a rug and everyone went around saying their name. Then the teachers lit a chalice and explained that by doing this they were creating a special time for the children to be together. This was a time to listen and show our care for one another. They asked the children if they had

a joy or a concern to share. By joy, they meant something that had made the children happy that week, and by concern, something that was bothering the children. Buckingham smiled a little when one girl said she had a joy; the tooth fairy had come to her last night. Another boy was happy because he was going to a birthday party later that day. Buckingham felt bad for a boy who talked about falling down and cutting his knee; he said it was better, but Buckingham could tell it still hurt a little. Then it was Samantha's turn to share. She said she had a joy because she could bring Buckingham to Sunday School and did not have to leave him at home like she did when she went to school on Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday and Friday. Then one of the teachers, Mr. Steve, said he had a joy and a concern to share.

The concern was that he had a hard time falling to sleep the night before. He said he was kind of nervous, because this was his first time teaching and he was not sure if he would be good at it or if the children would like the class. He said he made himself think of a beautiful hike he had taken in the mountains to calm himself down so he could sleep. Then he shared that his joy was that this was such a wonderful group of children and Teddy Bears, and that he was so glad he was going to have an opportunity to get to know everyone better.

Buckingham was surprised that a grownup could feel that way. Buckingham did not know that grownups could also feel unsure of themselves.

After the sharing time, the class did many things. They heard a story about a Teddy Bear's first Sunday at church. They had a snack of sliced apples and took a walk around the church so they would know where everything was.

Then the children sat all of their stuffed animal friends in a circle and lined up to go down the hall to the drinking fountain. The room was very quiet – no sounds from children – no sounds from adults.

One of the Teddy Bears slowly turned her head and looked at the others. She was not sure if the other stuffed animals would look back at her, when all of a sudden a Teddy Bear with a booming voice broke the silence.

“Hey y'all,” he said. “I did not know if I was going to like this, but I really do! I sure hope I can come back next week.”

“Me, too!” blurted out Buckingham. He was a little surprised at how loud he said it.

The other animals were surprised, too! They all looked at Buckingham, who could feel himself blushing a bit. Then all the animals, including Buckingham, started to giggle.

A little rabbit spoke up and said, “I’ve been coming here for a while – ever since my child was a baby. Let me tell you about some of the things we will do all year . . .” But before the rabbit could finish the sentence, they all heard the children coming back to the room.

“Quick,” said the rabbit. “Everyone back to your places – they’re coming back!” Quickly, the Teddy Bears and other animals got back into position, froze and were ready for the hugs of the children.

After awhile, the teachers explained that it was about time for the grownups to come for the children. With that, Samantha saw her mom and dad at the door. She ran up and gave them a hug and told them that she had a good time. She showed them around her room and said good-bye to her teachers and the other children.

As they were walking down the hall, she asked her parents if they were coming back next week. Her dad said, “Well, do you want to come back?”

“Oh, yes,” she said. “I really want to see everyone again.”

“Then that is just perfect,” said her mom. “We really want to come back and see everyone again, too!”

Samantha was so happy that she skipped all the way to the car. This was fun for Buckingham because he bounced up and down and up and down.

That evening, Buckingham felt calm and content. He was glad that they would be going back to church the next week. He had many reasons, but mostly he wanted to check in on the little boy who had scraped his knee. When the lights were low, he thought about the boy and hoped he was getting better. He felt peaceful and relaxed. In a little while, Buckingham was asleep.

Good night.

Sleep tight.

Don’t let the bed bugs bite.