

Don't mind me. I'm just the delinquent Mystery Reader who barely makes it to kindergarten on time

As I'm skimming my calendar for the day, I see meeting, meeting, meeting, Mystery Reader, meeting....

Mystery Reader? Wait, what? In our younger son's kindergarten classroom? TODAY?

Why would I have signed up to be the secret, surprise reader in kindergarten during the busiest work week of the year? I think I thought my husband could do it, but I must have had my weeks confused. May is our busiest season of the year, and neither one of us has time for anything extra this week.

There is nothing to be done. It's the last week of Mystery Reader, and I just can't miss it. You can let a whole kindergarten class and a teacher down, but you simply cannot ever ever ever ever let your very own child down that way.

So I run around the house on the way out the door to grab a few books and duck when my kindergartener says, "What are you doing with those books, Mama?"



"What? Um, oh, you know, I just thought we should get things organized."

"Mama," he said sternly. "Only Baba does that with the books."

He's right, of course. Mama has no sense of organizing anything-least of all her calendar. And I'm not sure how I'm going to slip out of the office to be a Mystery Reader and still finish everything on my plate. But here we go.

The work day zips by, and suddenly I realize I'm running late for my appearance. I jump in the car and get to the school, but I know I'm already a minute or two or

three late.

I'm buzzed inside the school and out of breath as I call out, "I'm the Mystery Reader," to my friend sitting at the front desk.

"They're ready for you," she says. Then she grins. "Hey, Rita. Did you buy those books on the way?"

She knows me so well. We laugh, and I head back to the classroom.

Our little boy's head is down and his eyes are covered. And when the children peek, they are all excited to see me.

"I thought it would be Andy's mom!"

But it's not. It's the running-late mom who forgot about Mystery Reader until this morning.

I sit down and we read. We make our way through a few pages of *Dear Pope Francis*, which is a lovely, lovely book, *Trashy Town*, and *Library Lion*.

My kindergartener stands next to my chair. He's proud and pleased that I am there. He helps pick which books in the pile of six we will read and he loves that it's our moment in the spotlight together. As his mom, I'm a celebrity, and he's one for having me there.

Then we're finished, and it's time to go.

As I'm walking out of the school, I think of when I was first a Mystery Reader for our older son. I spent weeks deciding which books to read, visiting the library, and making sure they were cool enough to bring to his class. Then there's today when I am just happy I got there and had books and that our younger son was happy to see me.

Somehow, though, both visits were equally successful. In fact, today may have even gone better because I didn't have time to be nervous about reading to a whole class. I was just so happy to make it.

Every child in a family has a different set of parents, a psychologist told me once. It's so true. I am parenting our two sons in similar and different ways—and not on purpose. It's that they are different people and I am a different parent of two children than I was as a new parent of one. And it's that I apparently don't know which week of the year not to schedule anything else in my life.

As we are driving home, I ask our little guy, "Were you surprised to see me?"

"No," he says with a smile. "I saw you getting the books this morning."

But he was still happy I was there. And that, at least, is no mystery.

***Joining Theology Is a Verb and Reconciled to You for Worth Revisiting
Wednesday on June 1, 2016***