

Rally Sunday Sermon

Scripture: Proverbs 8:1-7a, 10-11; Matthew 19: 13-15.

I'm sure some of you might be wondering why the children have been asked to stay through the service today. If we look at the Gospel lesson this morning, the disciples were trying to keep the children away from Jesus. The disciples most likely thought that the children would distract or bother him. Jesus then tells the disciples that the children should come to him unhindered and that they have a place with him. We need to remember this in our ministry. Children are not distractions to be sent away, but need to be brought to church and shown how we worship, and I believe more importantly, taught why we do the things we do. We need to be mindful that it is our job, as a congregation, to show our children how to worship and engage them in it so they are able to have the place they deserve at Christ's table. We, as adults, need to remember not to put obstacles between Jesus and our children as the disciples had tried to do.

For many of us, it has been years if not decades since we were in primary or secondary school. You might be surprised how much things have changed. Not only with what children today encounter in the world, but also in the way they learn. There are many people doing research on the different generations as they emerge into the workplace. Every generation has distinct attitudes, behaviors, expectations, and motivating points. In general, we have four generations in the workplace today: The Veterans (also called the Silent Generation) who are 63-80; then there are the Boomers from 44-62; next we have Generation X from 29-43 (this group is also being called the Survivors or the Net Generation); The newest generation to enter the workforce has been the Millennial Generation or Generation Next at about age 15-28. Both Gen X, and the Millennial's even more so, are extremely connected. They use the computer not just to get news and email but to Facebook, Myspace, Twitter, Blog, download music and videos, watch TV shows, instant message, and let's not forget that they can also do most of that on a cell phone where they can text too! They are given multimedia presentations and teachers are encouraged to present the material in a variety of ways to reach the different learning styles. So, I have a few questions for you: How many of you have a smart phone? How many of you know how to text? Of those, who texts every day? My sons will never know a world without a smart phone or texting. Aidan, when he was only three years old, could pick up our cell phones and navigate to games and YouTube videos without ever directly showing

him how. We have embraced this in our family by providing learning games like Super Why by PBS Kids, where he learns the alphabet, rhyming, spelling, and sentence completion. He's not just reliant on my husband and I instructing him, reading, and Sesame Street. He is drawn to these educational games on the computer, phone, and video games and learns well from them.

By a show of hands, how many of you have heard of Beloit College's Mindset list? For those who don't know of it there are several professors that have been putting these lists together since 1998 as a way to keep other professors from offering out of date references the students will not understand. First, I would like to share a few insights about my graduating class:

1. 1st generation to be born into Luvs, Huggies, & Pampers
2. There has always been a woman on the Supreme Court
3. Yugoslavia has never existed
4. The moonwalk is a Michael Jackson dance move, not a Neil Armstrong giant step.
5. Travel to space has always occurred in reusable spacecraft
6. We have no idea how big a breadbox is
7. We owned a doll with "Xavier Roberts" signed on its rear, or know someone who did (any know this?)
8. We have occasionally pondered why Smurfette was the only female
9. We wore bike shorts underneath a short skirt (or knew someone who did) and felt stylish.

There are many other pop culture references we could go into but I think you get the idea. Now let's talk about the entering college freshman.

1. Mostly were born in 1992
2. Few know how to write in cursive
3. Email is just too slow and seldom, if ever, use snail mail
4. "Caramel Macchiato" and "Venti half-calf vanilla latte" have always been street corner lingo
5. The world has always been trying to accommodate persons with disabilities
6. 25% of young people under age 18 have at least one immigrant parent, they aren't afraid of immigration...unless it involves real aliens from another planet.
7. Fergie is a pop singer, not a princess
8. Czechoslovakia has never existed

9. Having hundreds of cable channels and nothing to watch has always been routine.
- 10.They have never worried about a Russian missile strike on the US
- 11.And my personal favorite....They never twisted a coiled phone cord around their wrists mindlessly while chatting on the phone.

Today's younger generations are more tribal in nature and build a family out of a community of friends because they tend to live further from their parents or extended family. This could bode well for churches like ours, who pride ourselves on our sense of community. The challenge is reaching them. So, if our youth and young adults are so different, how are we supposed to reach them? There are some churches here in Houston that have gone to great lengths to reach the Millennial generation by encouraging tweeting during church. They tweet during the sermon, comments or questions, and some are selected to be displayed on a screen behind the Pastor. Now, I don't think we need to go to those lengths, but I do think we might need to rethink the Church model. One of the reasons youth and young adults' site for not staying at a church is because of a lack of assimilation because the worship and/or programming does not meet their needs or use their gifts. Research has also shown that youth and young adults are more likely to say "yes" to short term commitments as opposed to long term commitments to the various committees within the church. I will admit that the first time I was at the annual meeting I was very surprised by the length of service you agree to on the committees, which was especially scary to me not even knowing what most of the committees actually did!

Now, I don't have all the answers, but I do know we need to spend some time listening to our children and youth. Not cursory listening where you are waiting to jump in and offer an anecdote about your childhood or try to solve their problems. Just listen and be supportive. Cameron would like to share a little about what it is like for him in the world today. (Cameron speaks)

We need to recognize our children and youth, and really anyone who enters our building, for who they are and what they bring to the congregation. Let me paint a picture for you...Imagine a young man walking in with his hair spiked into a Mohawk and dyed green, piercings and tattoos visible, wearing torn up jeans and a t-shirt. He walks in a few minutes late to the service, and finding no seats in the rear comes and sits in the first row. Now what is your initial reaction? Consider that image, are you as willing to meet people where they are on their journey as we like to think we are. We cannot judge people by the way they dress or how they act. The same goes for our youth and young adults. When we baptize a child we, as

a church, promise to: love, support, and care for them as a member of Christ's family. One of the ways we do that is through our CE program. Not just with the classes we offer on Sunday mornings, but with extras such as our Halloween Happening, Advent Workshop, Christmas Pageant, Secret Friends, etc.

By a show of hands: How many of you attended Christian Education classes as a child or youth? How many of you remember the name of at least one of your CE teachers? Who here feels that the Christian Education they received as a child positively influenced their life? Our children deserve that same positive influence no matter what their age.

Now, our spiritual care of our baptized does not end when they reach confirmation. We again say that we accompany them on their faith journey as members of the church. Once our youth are confirmed we must recognize that they are full members of the church not just "the future." If you don't make them feel like that have a place and are involved, that you want them involved, they will leave. We need to include them and see them as the equals they are. They do need guidance, just as any new member does, in figuring out how the church works and where their gifts and talents lend themselves. We need to look at their gifts and suggest ways for it to fit in the church.

Our scripture today spoke of the importance of education and how important children were to Jesus' ministry. The church is a place to experience joy, meaning and community no matter who you are or where you are on your faith journey. It is also a place to reflect on the teachings of Jesus and continually learn. Lets us continue to grow, listen to each other, and learn together, while striving to be more accepting and understanding of our differences.