

Five Generations, We Are (Ancestors and Descendants Too...)

Rev. Sarah Campbell

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In the new year, in the new decade, let us be awake to the gift. Let us not take it for granted. Let us give ourselves more fully to it. And let's make it even thicker. The gift of multi-generational community!

This church has a long, long history of fostering multi-generational relationships--with amazing Sunday school teachers, senior friends, confirmation mentors. How lucky is this church to have children's and youth choir directors, and a full-time faith formation director, Eli'jah Carrol, and a visioning team to dream, with him, of what can be? What happens in worship is only one part of this story of the weaving together of generations.

Do you know that there is a counter, counter narrative going on? And it's not just here. I heard about the same trend at the Senior Minister conference I went to this past week in Florida, the same movement is going on in progressive UCC churches around the country.

The public philosopher David Brooks posits that the 60s revolution, which was a rejection of the conformity of the 50s, has resulted in a hyper individualism that has broken down communities. Everyone doing "their own thing" has led to deepening isolation, even unto to death. While many of us see more value in the 60s revolution than Brooks, the increasing loneliness in our culture *is* troubling.

The media, by and large, is big on the "leaving church narrative", so much so that they miss some of the other narratives, both anecdotal and statistical. It's true that church or synagogue can no longer be presumed, as it once was. But it is also true that more and more young parents and young adults are reflecting on the nature of life-- that human beings need community and need a religious path that invites even more reflection on life and more still-- and these thoughtful young parents and young adults are choosing to commit, to commit to community, to multi-generational community and a shared religious path. It's happening at Mayflower and at Shir Tikvah down the road and all over the city and across the land.

"OK boomer" We're going to be hearing that more and more in this place....oh yes we are.... Your heard last week about the bubbling up of a young adult group, 20 plus strong, people in their 20s and 30s, at Mayflower? The generations are ribbing each other, sometimes elbowing each other, there's going to be a little tension now and then, but mostly, we are all loving this inter-generational thing we have going, and we just want it to get thicker and thicker. That young adult group won't be talking about splitting off in the future. They'll be talking about taking over!

Community... this place... this building is the beloved body that holds the community, often cramped we are, or maybe cozy is the word: Think narthex. The flow is inefficient and chaotic or maybe it's a creative dance: Think hallway. The encounters unpredictable even haphazard, with irregular attendance and participation... This is not a smooth-running efficient machine with clear outcomes, but rather a dynamic, organic community of people with soul hunger.

I remember, why is it that I still remember this?, I was in my 20s, in the midst of a really hard patch in life, anxiety ridden I was, but somehow I got myself out of bed that morning and went to First Congregational Church, my church at the time though my attendance was spotty... and after the service I went into the parlor for coffee hour but sat by myself on a couch at a distance, and she just sat down...don't remember her name... I didn't know her... but she was at least 40 years my senior, she had done 40 more years than I of this thing called life... and we talked, I don't even remember about what... she wasn't intrusive, she was just somehow with me... it was a kind of lifeline in that moment... one of those unpredictable encounters in community that, in retrospect, was a kind of miracle.

This text, the Bible, the sacred stories, gives us life, feeding us meaning and hope... oh how we need it.

And yet, I confess, the longer that I'm a minister, I'm finding that it's your stories, our stories, that keep feeding my soul, that feed me meaning and hope. Your stories, you who have been fed these stories; you who try to live this story; you who have somehow learned how to live with the grain of God's love, rather than against the grain; you who have had your heart broken, life will do this, but instead of your heart breaking you down, shattering and scattering you, somehow your heart has broken you open and your love pours forth even more and more.... It's your stories that keep me going. I so want to share them, so want you to share them with one another.... it's these stories AND these stories that are the bread of life for us.

Today's bible story is often entitled "Young Jesus Teaching In the Temple". Don't know where the adage "children should be seen but not heard" originated. Certainly not from the book of Luke. Just look at Jesus speaking his heart out in the temple at age 12. We get it. Our adage at Mayflower is "out of the mouth of babes...." comes not just cute retorts but great wisdom! Remember these? "Just scooch over." and "No! I'm putting baby Jesus in his mother's arms, not in the manger." There is this power in the children of this community... And get this: Because Mayflower children grew up singing "Let us build a house where love can dwell", there was no way this church could submit to NIMBY ferocity, there's always going to be NIMBY, and not build Creekside commons. The children were watching the adults closely back then... To see whether we would really live what we sang together... whether the faith really means anything.... Hmm... What's next? We sing together "I am a child of this planet". The children are watching what we do and don't do for the earth. Where will our faith take us? How far will we go?

But there's more to this Bible story. Something jumped out this time, that I don't remember hearing in the past. How about for you? This phrase: "They found him in the temple, sitting among the teachers, listening to them and asking them questions." This is a beautiful multi-generational story. Jesus not only speaks, but he listens to the elders, perhaps leaning in and listening especially to the ones he was most curious about or drawn to....

How lucky were those youth that Sunday morning down in their special room to be sitting around George Reimer and hearing his faith story. Or the Sunday when Jim Kusunoki shared his story of being interned in a Japanese American camp. How he not only survived but thrived... How does that happen?! Or when Gloria Englund tells her story about how the death of her son due to drug addiction has turned her into a passionate healer/leader. Alfred Whitehead said: "Moral education is impossible without the habitual vision of greatness." In this multi-generational community, our children, all of us are intermingling on a weekly basis with great, good people. Our communion bread is delicious, our music is often exquisite. And our elders are people of good/great character. All have suffered. Many have been betrayed by country or people they trust. Many have lived through wars and rumors of wars and hard times. But still they choose to love. They choose to hope. As one Brit said in inimitable British style: "The most indispensable viaticum for the journey of life is a store of adequate ideals, and these are acquired in a very simple way, by living with the best things in the world—the best pictures, the best buildings, the best social or political orders, the best human beings. The way to acquire a good taste in anything, from pictures to architecture, from literature to character, from wine to cigars, is always the same—be familiar with the best specimens of each." (Brooks book) We have good specimens at mayflower!

Say you are in a hard spot or a new chapter in life... there's a wealth of helping resources at your fingertips—articles, books, lectures, pod casts, just google your issue and there it is! What to do. step by step manual instructions... It's all out there. Plus, the help is anonymous! You don't have to show vulnerability. But! this guidance, extensive though it is, pales in comparison to that one phrase, that crystalized wisdom from a lifetime of experience, that that older person at church says to you one day; that person whom you have known and seen for years... you have a sense of them, how they speak or refrain from speaking, what they are like in times of conflict or in times of fun, their body language, how they relate to newcomers and diversity, how they worked on that committee or team years ago. It's not that you've studied them but over time you are just kind of aware of them and how you've come to respect them....Well, somehow they say just what you need to hear; and it sticks. You don't know it yet, but this conversation, brief though it may be, with this person, even helps to shape your character, how you choose to live, how you choose to respond to suffering.

I'm in a new chapter of life. I'm in a kind of dual and overlapping eco system. I am a grandmother now, new life, she's almost one and a half, and lives three miles west off 38th St. and a daughter of parents who are now closing down their lives, they live three miles east into the better twin, St. Paul. I am in this chapter of life with such joy on the one hand and such deep sadness on the other. How fortunate I was to be with the Women of a Certain Age, their age is older than mine, and to learn from them. These women I respect enormously. Last year they threw me a surprise shower and oriented me into grand motherhood with succinct wisdom—It's more wonderful than you could ever imagine and keep your opinions on parenting to yourself. At least, this is what I heard. Great advice. This December I was with them too. I was asked about my parents. I looked around and said something like: "I never knew it was so hard. You've all been through this. What quiet heroism it takes to get

through this life.” I said that I was so sad that my parents were leaving me, their bodies and their minds fading away and breaking down. Sad for them and sad for me. One of the women of a certain age said something like, or this what I heard... “Sarah, they’ll be ready, it’s okay. When the time comes, they’ll be ready.” And It was just what I needed to hear.

Oh beloved, multi-generational community, we teach one another how to live and how to die. So, show up. Reach out. Walk across the Fireside room and sit with someone who is alone. Share. Be vulnerable. Sometimes we say the wrong thing, sometimes the right, sometimes we hear the wrong thing, but often we hear just what we need to hear, so listen. Schedule a good old one on one conversation with someone. Let’s thicken our community this year especially between generations.

And let’s dance! When you dance together you got that joy ingredient going. Saturday evening, 5:00, Jan 25th. Be there and be square!

Sources

Brooks, David, [The Second Mountain: The Quest for a Moral Life](#), Random House, 2019.

