

Psalm 78:1-7
Generations: Blessing and Honor
Rev. Jonathan P. Cornell
11-1-15

Well, good morning. Once again, it's good to be back with you this Sunday. I'm particularly thankful for a few things this morning, number one that Mark Perry was so graciously willing to step up to the plate last week and come through in the clutch when I needed him. Amy and Conner are currently at home and doing wonderfully. Thank you for your prayers and support. And secondly, I'm thankful for the choir this morning leading us in one of my all-time favorite praise and worship songs.

That refrain – God of wonders – is going to be our rallying cry this month. One of the wonders of God that I have beheld this week is how a 13-day old can produce dirty diapers as numerous as the sands of the seashore and the stars in the sky. I'm not kidding, I felt like Moses parting the Red Sea getting from our bed to the shower this morning. Let my people go!

But the good news is that he, all by himself, has settled into a predictable routine. In fact, for the last few days, being the tiny tyrant, the benevolent dictator in diapers, he has so graciously allowed his parents to sleep nearly 5 hours at a time. Which goes to show that this kid is a born Presbyterian – even his sleeping, eating, and pooping is in order... though I'm not sure how decent it is.

We will tell the next generation the praiseworthy deeds of the Lord, his power and the wonders he has done. If I had to come up with a rallying cry for this church, during this month where we're considering stewardship and our financial plans for next year, it would be this: ***We will tell the wondrous deeds of our God to the next generation.***

If you are someone who recesses downstairs after worship for coffee and conversation, or you've come to one of our Life Together Wednesday Community Meals, or been on campus when our Preschool is in session, you will no doubt have noticed that the next generation is not somewhere out there as a hope and a prayer...it's here, it's among us. Their voices are echoing through the walls of this historic building as we speak. I've spoken with a number of you who have expressed just how grateful to God you are for that Holy Chaos that ensues after church and on Wednesday nights.

As a church, we've been given this incredible gift to be able to invest in our children with the Good News of Jesus, and teach them the Gospel, so that they will be young disciples. Every time we baptize one of our young ones, we commit to raise them up to know and love Jesus Christ as Lord. We do that through our volunteers and parents who generously give of their Sundays to teach Godly Play, the top notch Sunday School method in which we've invested, as well as being a church that cares for families and sees itself as the proverbial village that raises its young.

These are things that we can take for granted, in a time when many churches like ours are struggling to engage the next generation. If you just look at the numbers, they're kind of staggering. Did you know that the fastest growing religious demographic in America is a group

pollsters call the “*nones*.” Not *n u n s*, but *n o n e s*. These are people who claim no religious affiliation whatsoever and are a part of no faith community.

David Kinneman, head of the Barna Research Group, conducted a study that found that over 40% of people ages 18-29 are outside the church. One scholar named Robert Putnam says that the *none* movement is the single greatest shift in the religious landscape in American in the last 50 years. Most of these people say their impressions of churches is that it is unfriendly and judgmental, one out of three say that church is out of touch and boring.

Now, I realize that living in the Midwest, in what Charlie Miller calls the upper edge of the Bible Belt, we have a bit of a buffer from this trend in that Christianity holds a respected place in society that it doesn't on the same way on the coasts.

But here's what's interesting about this statistic: 85% of those who identify as *nones* don't claim to be atheist. In fact, many show a genuine interest in the spiritual life and God, they're just jaded by organized religion—a Christianity that feels too aligned with a particular political party, or who has a narrow box of what followers should look like. They're suspicious of a Christianity that doesn't address their questions honestly and humbly.

So here's a question for us: when people drive by this Gothic Building on the corner of Hill and Miami in the heart of Wabash, Indiana, what do they see? Do they see a relic of a bygone era, or do they see a center for compassion, mission, and witness here in Wabash?

Throughout the Bible, we are given this challenge: “Don't forget the next generation.” Teach them the stories, the wonder, the impact that God has had on your life and in our world.

This morning, Psalm 78 paints a vivid image of what it's like to live a life without God. This Psalm is attributed to a guy named Asaph—which, for those of you who are keeping record, was the name choice that came in a close second to Conner. And later in verse 11, he says, “They forgot the things he had once done, and the miracles he'd shone.” Verse 57 says they were like a faulty bow.

Anyone here ever shot an arrow or hit the target with a faulty bow? Me neither. That was always my excuse for not missing the target, a faulty bow. But Asaph warns that living a life without God is like trying to hit the target with bad equipment – it isn't going to happen.

So how do we hit the target? How is it that we will not forsake the next generation? How will we become a church that tells the wondrous deeds of our mighty God to all generations?

I think it begins right here in our midst, by sharing in the reciprocal relationship of blessing and honoring. At the end of worship today, each family will be given a magnet. Originally, we were planning to send these in the mail with your stewardship letter and pledge card. But we didn't consult with Linda Gabel first. Turns out magnets are considered hazardous material. Lesson learned. On these refrigerator magnets is the graphic we've come up with for this month's series. These reciprocal arrows are a metaphor for what this church is all about. One points to the other and vice versa, all in continuous circular motion. The younger generation *honors* the sacrifice

and hard work of the elder generation. And the elder generation *bleses* the younger generation by inviting them to lead and inspire this congregation.

Throughout the Bible, as we'll see in the next few weeks, God uses people on the back nine of life to do remarkable things. As one pastor puts it, if you're not dead, you're not done. There is no mandatory retirement age of 62 in God's kingdom. And for those of you who fit into this demographic, I want to challenge you to ask the question: "In what way is God inviting me to pass along his blessing to the younger generation?"

And for those of us who are in the emerging generation, the Scripture is full of stories of God doing wonderful things through unassuming youth. Joseph, David, Elisha, Jeremiah, Mary, and Timothy all experienced the call of God and stepped forward in faith even though they were young and untested.

Not only that, but we are invited to honor those who've gone before us. Last week, I got a phone call from my dad who shared with me that Dr. Bob Dickson, the 90-something former Senior Pastor of Hope Presbyterian Church, where I grew up, passed along a word of encouragement to me. You see, Bob, at nearly 95 years young, is a bit of a tech junkie, and he gets each month's newsletter. Getting an "attaboy" from him was like getting a phone call from the President. It was a blessing from which I was motivated to keep moving forward, keep working, keep the faith, keep honoring that great tradition of loving Jesus and serving him.

The way we become an intergenerational church is through this reciprocal relationship of Blessing and Honoring.

A second way in which we can become a church for all generations, one that bucks this trend of the *nones*, is by having the faith to unleash the creative ideas to reach those unchurched and maybe even jaded members of our community. Those who, right now, aren't asking: "Gee, I wonder what the Presbyterians are doing at 10am on Sunday morning."

This is why I invited Aaron here to be with us this morning. Through the openness of the Wabash School systems and the forward thinking leadership there, Aaron is able to connect with and love teenagers within the schools who might not otherwise have a Jesus-loving person in their life.

Last Thursday, a group of us met at First United Methodist to discern and pray over becoming the lead congregations to provide Kids Hope, a mentoring program to OJ Neighbours Elementary. Kids Hope pairs one adult with one child for one hour each week, in order to love them with heart of Jesus and potentially change the trajectory of their future.

A few weeks ago during coffee hour, I heard about an idea that a few of our men are hatching to use Ed Building space for co-working opportunities. Co-working is when men and women who work in different industries all get together and share a common space to work and problem solve together.

We also have someone in our congregation who is experienced in broadcasting and sound engineering, and I've spoken with him about creative ways to use media platforms like podcasting and live internet broadcasting for open and public dialogs on subjects relating to faith and life, right here in Wabash at a place like Modoc's.

Jesus has a beautiful, expansive, magnificent vision of what God's reign on earth looks like. It's called the kingdom of God. He says in the Gospels that wherever mercy, love, generosity, and grace are present, the Kingdom of God is breaking through—literally where two or three are gathered in his name, Jesus is present. That can happen in times of worship and community like this, but it also happens when people get together to make meals for someone who is sick. When we take time to listen to one another's struggles and pray for each other over a cup of coffee. It can happen when kids in our community know that their future isn't limited by the circumstance of their present, because men and women who are committed to sharing that great story, that wonderful promise, invest in their lives.

This is not just our future, it's our present. And yes, it may involve trying, and perhaps even failing at some new approaches; it may involve us asking one another to be patient or see ministry in creative new terms; it will certainly involve each of us stepping into new opportunities that feel beyond our comfort zone. But Jesus reminds us that it's in our weakness, our vulnerability, where his power is made perfect. As Eugene Peterson puts it, the place where we find God is at the end of our ropes.

Truly this is an exciting time in the life of the Church. Culture is shifting, one generation is giving way to the next. And if we have the courage to trust and follow the Spirit's lead, we will be forever changed and will become the Holy Instrument Jesus set out for us to be.

Amen.