

## **WHEN TO CELEBRATE A GENERATION**

Psalm 78:1-8

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May 17, 2009

### **PROLOGUE**

Everett L. Fullam ("Terry"), known for his work in church renewal, has said:

It is possible, even in a single generation, for those who once knew God, experienced His might and power, understood His truth, and sought to walk in His ways, to be followed by a generation that does not know God, cares nothing for His word, and has no idea of what His will or His purpose is. We are the generation in the middle. Who is going to tell [the next generation] if we do not?

### **SCRIPTURE**

Give ear, O my people, to my teaching; incline your ears to the words of my mouth. {2} I will open my mouth in a parable; I will utter dark sayings from of old, {3} things that we have heard and known, that our ancestors have told us. {4} We will not hide them from their children; we will tell to the coming generation the glorious deeds of the LORD, and his might, and the wonders that he has done. {5} He established a decree in Jacob, and appointed a law in Israel, which he commanded our ancestors to teach to their children; {6} that the next generation might know them, the children yet unborn, and rise up and tell them to their children, {7} so that they should set their hope in God, and not forget the works of God, but keep his commandments; {8} and that they should not be like their ancestors, a stubborn and rebellious generation, a generation whose heart was not steadfast, whose spirit was not faithful to God (Psalm 78:1-8 NRSV).

### **INTRODUCTION**

The term "generation gap" was first coined in the 1960s to describe differences between people of a younger generation and their elders, especially regarding musical tastes and fashion. Nearly three thousand years earlier, the writer of Psalm 78 spoke of a gap between the generations based not on music styles but on how people respond to God. A generation that has rejected God is to be decried. But a generation that sets its hope on God is to be celebrated.

### **1. WHEN A GENERATION LIVES THE FAITH**

It is worth celebrating when a generation lives the faith.

Each of us has a life story - who we are, where were born, where are ancestors came from,

where we live and go to school or work. Groups of people also have a story. Throughout this past year, we have been appreciating the group known as “First Presbyterian” through the observance of our 125<sup>th</sup> Anniversary as a congregation. We are grateful for God’s faithfulness in the past and that he is our sure hope for the future.

First Presbyterian Church is part of a greater group of congregations identified as Presbyterian and Reformed. These churches have been guided by the teachings of the Protestant Reformers such as Martin Luther and John Calvin. However, Luther wanted to change only what was hopelessly corrupt about the church. Calvin wanted a more complete reformation of the church based on the teachings of Scripture. Queen Elizabeth I of England remarked that the teachings of Calvin were more “reformed” than the Lutheran. This term continues to be used today to describe Presbyterian beliefs.

This year marks the 500<sup>th</sup> anniversary of John Calvin’s birth (July 10). Few leaders in history have evoked greater extremes than John Calvin. He is either deeply admired or greatly abhorred. He has had a profound influence on millions of Christians, including Presbyterians. But this is not always appreciated. An Anglican priest, departing for England after giving a series of lectures in Scotland, was asked how he liked Scotland. “The country has its good qualities,” he said, “but it has three serious drawbacks. It's always raining. It's very cold. And there are too many Presbyterians.” “In that case,” replied his host, “I suggest you go to hell. It never rains. It's always hot. And there are no Presbyterians.”

Actually, anybody who is a Christian can be a Presbyterian. We do not claim to have all the answers but we do try to ask the right questions. We are guided by a pattern of understanding the Bible known as Reformed theology and a structure that stresses active participation in ministry by both clergy and laity. We are only one part of the family of God but we believe we have something to contribute to the greater Church. And we are thankful for the faithfulness of those who preceded us.

## **2. WHEN A GENERATION PASSES ON THE FAITH**

It is worth celebrating when a generation lives the faith. It is also worth celebrating when a generation passes on the faith.

This was God’s intent from the beginning. God chose Abraham:

“...So that he will direct his children and his household after him to keep the way of the LORD” (Gen 18:19).

Psalm 78, which is the official text for the Calvin Jubilee, encourages the people of God to hand on the heritage of the faith to the next generation – as Calvin did successfully before us:

“We will tell to the coming generation the glorious deeds of the LORD, and his might, and the wonders that he has done...that the next generation might know them, the children yet unborn, and rise up and tell them to their children, so that they should set their hope in God” (78:4, 6, 7).

The New Testament is even more emphatic about God wanting us to pass on the meaning and message of faith to others:

And Jesus came and said to them, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded you. And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age" (Matt 28:18-20 NRSV).

The making of new disciples seems to be problematic for Presbyterians. Even when we manage to commit ourselves to sharing the Gospel, we often feel hopelessly inept. It reminds me of the old joke (which most of you know but it is worth repeating), “What do you get when you cross a Presbyterian with a Jehovah’s Witness? Someone who knocks on your door but then has nothing to say!”

If you know God has been at work in your life then, of course, you have something to say. But perhaps you need some coaching in how to share your faith. If even the thought of this makes you break out into a “cold sweat” then I want you to know you are not alone. I also want you to know that there are many resources available to help you. Here are two:

- ◆ The Alpha Course. The Alpha Course is an opportunity to explore the Christian faith in a relaxed setting over ten thought provoking weekly sessions. First Church has been a leader in this for the last ten years. Take the course, if you have yet to do so. Invite a friend, co-worker or family member to take the course.
- ◆ *Just Walk Across the Room*. This is an award winning book by Bill Hybels. You can pick up the book yourself and/or wait until I teach it in the coming year (January-February). The book’s description includes this:

What if you knew that by simply crossing the room and saying hello to someone, you could change that person’s life forever? Just a few steps to make an eternal difference. It has nothing to do with methods and everything to do with taking a genuine interest in another human being. All you need is a heart that’s in tune with the Holy Spirit and a willingness to venture out of your “Circle of Comfort” and into another person’s life.

### **3. WHEN A (NEW) GENERATION RECEIVES THE FAITH**

It is worth celebrating when a generation lives and passes on the meaning and message of faith. It is also worth celebrating when a new generation receives the faith.

The Bible tells us that when even one person turns to God, all heaven throws a party:

“Or imagine a woman who has ten coins and loses one. Won't she light a lamp and scour the house, looking in every nook and cranny until she finds it? And when she finds it you can be sure she'll call her friends and neighbors: 'Celebrate with me! I found my lost coin!' Count on it—that's the kind of party God's angels throw every time one lost soul turns to God" (Lk 15:8-10 (MESSAGE)).

None are too young to learn of God nor are any too old to begin the journey of faith. But whether young or old, you must make a personal response. No one can do it for you.

The way of the Lord has been revealed to us through the Law and the Prophets and most clearly and lovingly through the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. The term the Bible uses to describe someone who desires to learn the way of the Lord is “disciple.” A disciple is one who has not only heard about Jesus but has also made a decision to respond to Christ in a personal and visible way.

### **CONCLUSION**

What a joy it is know the redeeming love of God in Jesus Christ and what a privilege to pass this knowledge on to others. May our goal in life be that when our time here on earth has ended, a new generation will say of us, “They were faithful in every way.” That would be worth celebrating!