

A Few Thoughts for the Hunkered-Down

Tuesday, October 20, 2020

Remembering Our Forgotten Youth

In the last days, God says, I will pour out my Spirit on all people. Your sons and daughters will prophesy, your young men will see visions, your old men will dream dreams. —Acts 2:17 (Joel 2:28)

Don't let anyone look down on you because you are young, but set an example for the believers in speech, in life, in love, in faith and in purity.

—1 Timothy 4:12

In a recent Sunday School series for the adult class the topic has been the privileged and unprivileged in our society, and the topic has set us all to thinking. (And thanks Sara Gibson for stepping up to teach this thought-provoking topic.) In the discussion it has become clear that privilege and prejudice are more complex a matter than what is commonly presented. We are led by the media to think much in terms of racial and gender categories, but there are numerous other lines of inequality which deserve our attention. One matter of inequality which came to my attention is that of age, but be warned, for my long-held concern over age discrimination is very different from the popular narrative.

When the term age-ism is mentioned it is commonly used in reference to discrimination against older people. All must agree that some are discriminated against in hiring because of their abundant years, and that respect is owed, though not always given, to our older neighbors. In my lifetime the seniors have quite successfully rallied to challenge these currents, and now the AARP (American Association of Retired People) is as strong and feared as any lobbying organization in Washington. This is not to say that discrimination against older folks has been eliminated, or that seniors have it easy, but the older folks have certainly found their political voice and gained great clout. My greater concern, however, is not so much for our seniors, but for a group that I believe receives too little attention and support—the twenty to forty-something set.

This concern was vividly renewed in my mind when I heard a story shared in class about a twenty-year-old standing in a car dealership lot and being ignored for some time, only to see the sales staff quickly respond to a middle-aged couple who came into that same lot. While I have never been in that exact situation, the feeling was very familiar, and as one who in my youth was usually taken for even younger than my actual age, I could readily relate to the experience. Perhaps you remember a time in your youth when you entered a store to make a somewhat serious purchase but were

overlooked or not immediately taken seriously by the sales staff. You probably remember discussions when an older person would cut you off by reminding you that “You're just a kid! I've been around a long time and I learned that....” Young folks are not always taken seriously or given the full consideration that they may deserve.

This year has been a particularly concerning one for our young people and young families. This is a stage in life when people are financially frail and low on the totem pole at work. They are burdened with raising children, which has extra challenges in these days of the virus, and though this is a joyous task it presents numerous stresses and pressures. What a heartbreak that through all the virus shut-downs there has been so little media focus upon these young folks who are feeling the economic stress the worst! Granted, younger people have little to fear of bodily harm from the virus, but the effect it has had on their economic and mental health has been greatly overlooked.

Yes, it can be pointed out that the Bible repeatedly exalts maturity and calls us to give privilege to the seniors. Many are quick to mention that the young have more energy and resilience with which to meet a crisis than their parents, and this also is true. But we do well to remember Paul who wanted his son in the faith to be properly honored despite his youth. Jesus always had a special place in his heart for the children, and we must frequently remember that our Lord was only thirty years old when he began his brief but world saving ministry! As we age, we come to love the privileges that go with it. Think for a moment of the Church nursery's ongoing need for volunteers. “Oh, I've done my share of child raising. Let the younger people do that,” is the common refrain. We can be quick to boast of our having paid our dues, and then look upon the younger ones to “do their share,” with little thought given to the stresses that the younger set might be facing.

Young people and young families do not have it as easy and carefree as we may be quick to presume. In fact, I am convinced that generally they have been dealt a harder hand to play in the game than their seniors. I say all this, not to perpetuate that unproductive game of who-can-lament-being-the-most-underprivileged, but to get us thinking about this generally overlooked portion of our society. Look around to the young people and families that surround you. Put yourself in their shoes for a while, and then serve and encourage as the Lord guides. And the next time you hear someone mention ageism or age discrimination, you may dare suggest that they pursue that topic with an eye and a heart for all ages.

Blessings,

Pastor Jim

God our Father, we pray for our young people growing up in an unstable and confusing world. Show them that your ways give more meaning to life

than the ways of the world, and that following you is better than chasing after selfish goals. Help them to take failure not as a measure of their worth but as a chance for a new start. Give them strength to hold their faith in you, and to keep alive their joy in your creation through Jesus Christ our Lord. —The Episcopal Book of Common Prayer.