

OK Boomer

Haggai 1:15b—2:9; Psalm 145:1-5, 17-21; 2 Thessalonians 2:1-5, 13-17; Luke 20:27-38

I want to begin this morning by taking a quick poll. Put your hand up if you have ever heard the expression, “OK Boomer” My 15 year old granddaughter asked me that question and I had to say “No.” When she asked my wife the same question she thought maybe it meant that she was a boomer and she was OK. It turns out that when someone who is a “Boomer” says something stupid like, “All these millennials have no work ethic. They expect a pay cheque but have no commitment to even showing up on time.” The millennial’s response is “OK Boomer.” It is a generational put-down. Or if a younger generation begins taking on too many characteristics of a “Boomer” they may be told OK Boomer. It is shocking when you have thought that yours was the “cool” generation and suddenly discover that a younger generation does not share that perspective when did “them” become “us?”

I am thinking about this because of the Psalm reading for today: “One generation will praise your works to the next one, proclaiming your mighty acts. They will talk all about the glorious splendour of your majesty; I will contemplate your wondrous works.”

My parents never worried about whether or not I would grow up Christian, did yours?

Christianity was the only game in town, religiously speaking. Genelle, British Columbia, was a small bedroom community and the only religious buildings in the community were the United Church and the Roman Catholic Church. Christianity was the religion of the majority of those in North America. Church, state, and middle class culture joined forces in an alliance to undergird goodness, respectability, and the Canadian way of life.

Christianity, as we practised it, was a willing and eager enlistee in this project. Being Christian was roughly synonymous with being a thinking, sensitive, compassionate Canadian. Every commercial outlet closed on Sunday. There was a traffic jam at 9:30 Sunday morning as people

flocked to church and Sunday School. Christian formation, such as it was, endeavoured to bring out the best in already good Christian people, appealing to our allegedly innate inclinations and most charitable, natural dispositions. The gospel was reduced to conventional, Canadian common sense.

Whether or not my parents were justified in thinking that I would quite naturally, unavoidably embrace the Christian faith, I find it remarkable that no one thinks that today. No North American Christian—no matter denomination or geographic location—believes that our children will grow up Christian simply by being born into it. Being Christian is no longer (if it ever really was) normal, natural, innate, or typical.

I find it remarkable that this seismic shift in the church's self-consciousness has occurred during my adult lifetime. Christianity, having once thought of itself as the majority, established faith of our culture, is no longer dominant, not completely disestablished in some places but definitely moving toward the margins everywhere. There is a widespread realization that Christians are made, not born (Tertullian), that baptism is initiation into a counter-cultural community of theological indoctrination and moral formation named church. Christians are resident aliens in a society we Christians once thought we owned.

Will Willimon tells this story about an incident with his son's Sunday school teacher: "I must talk with you," said the prim older woman who taught the Northside UMC first grade Sunday School class.

"But the service begins in five minutes," I protested.

She continued unabated, "I was reading the children the story of our Lord's nativity. Your son kept waving his hand until I stopped and recognized him.

"I've asked my Dad how babies are made and I'm sure he never said anything like *that* story.' William said. It upset some of our more sensitive children and I'm sure you would not want this to be

whispered about in the congregation. You will know how to discipline him.”

Parents give life to children and then children return the favour by rebirthing parents into new and unexpected experiences of the faith.”

In a sense, the church I grew up in didn't need to worry about Christian formation fifty years ago. Who needs cultivation and instruction into a way of life that is already embraced by nine out of ten average people?

Today we find ourselves in a changed situation. There is a growing awareness among us that The centre of world Christianity is shifting eastward and southward from North America and Europe. Christians are once again having to think our way into a new world that is no longer “our” world. The truth who is Jesus Christ is amazingly adaptive, supple, and relevant to a world of emerging economies, new democracies, non-western peoples, and an exploding global Christianity.

The Christian faith has rich resources for thinking our way through the new challenges for discipleship.

The body of Christ is a body meant to be in motion and service to a living Lord and that means that we must be ready to think our way through new demands upon faithfulness.

Education, inculcation, indoctrination, formation, catechesis are essential aspects of conversion into the way of the gospel, a way that is neither innate nor natural.

In our changed situation God gives us a new connection with sisters and brothers in young churches who have never known the presumption of establishment. Some may lament that the world of the presumed Christian hegemony over North American culture, if it ever really was, is now over. But there is also a sense in which the changing world, at least our North American world, has restored the necessity and the adventure of Christian formation.

In Christian formation, in one generation passing on to another what it has learned about God,

the church graciously gives us the skills we need to resist, to equip the saints, and then to march to the beat of a Different Drummer who never owned a drum.

One cannot be born into the Christian faith. Christ who is the way, the truth, and the life is accessed only through his own self-giving, not through our astute spiritual rumination. The gospel is not to be discovered through long walks in the woods or by rummaging about in our own egos.

Someone has to tell you this odd story that is the gospel. Someone must lead you step-by-step down the narrow way that leads to life eternal. We must submit ourselves to faithful educators. Christian education is thus training in how to be receivers, receiving a story so strange and so true that we cannot tell it to ourselves.

I predict that more of this congregation's energies will be expended in one generation doing all it can to pass on the faith to the next generation of Christians. It's never good enough for a Christian to say, "I have my own faith on Jesus and I'm guarding it for myself."

Every disciple of Christ is called to be an evangelist, someone who passes on the good news to someone else. As Psalm 145 says,

One generation will praise your works to the next one,
proclaiming your mighty acts.

They will talk all about the glorious splendor of your majesty;

I will contemplate your wondrous works.

If you were raised in the proverbial "good Christian home," then good for you. I daresay that many of us in this congregation were not. That means that those who know Christ have a sacred responsibility to share what they know of Christ with those who are just meeting Christ as One generation praises God's works to the next one, proclaiming God's mighty acts.

Blessings upon those of you who are teachers in this congregation, sharing what you know of

the faith with others. We need to look for more ways to equip our young Christians for the challenges that they will meet in life. And we need to be sure that parents are encouraged to have their children participate in the educational, formational opportunities that this church offers.

It's our job, as elder Christians,(known to other generations as Boomers) beguilingly to share the riches of the faith with new generations of Christians. A primary designation for Jesus is "rabbi." He promised the Holy Spirit would come and teach us everything we needed to know to be his disciples. That is fortunate because in this faith we never become so adept at believing that we no longer have need for additional formation. We never lose our amateur status in regard to handling the truth who is Jesus Christ.

Rather than trying to evoke something that is already within people, in Christian education we have the joy of offering people a new way of life, a different world than they could have had if we had left them to their own devices. Jesus promises to equip those whom he calls. Conversion to Christ is a lifelong process of letting go of the ideas and devices that are inappropriate for truthful living now that Jesus Christ is Lord—even if the world has yet fully to get the news.

One generation will praise your works to the next one,
proclaiming your mighty acts.

They will talk all about the glorious splendour of your majesty;

Now, let's continue our worship as we proclaim God's mighty acts and celebrate the glorious splendour of God With Us. Thanks be to God. Amen.