

As the third part of a four-part series of sermons considering the future of the church, four Davidson College students provided 'sermonettes' based on Luke 8:22-25. The students are Davidson-Stapleton Interns, working at Charlotte non-profit ministries and organizations serving the city's most vulnerable populations. They were asked to reflect on their experience in the church and share their perspective on its future, informed in part by several broad generalizations about their generation that were included in an earlier part of the series (see June 13).

Lindsay Beck

Within a few minutes of my speaking you may realize I'm not exactly the typical American young adult that you heard some generalizations about in last week's sermon. You will have to excuse the accent—I am, quite literally, “hahlf and haff.”

Having been raised in a Christian home by truly Christ-following parents, I was quite the know-it-all at Sunday school. I was that unnecessarily competitive child in the Bible Trivia games. However, I didn't fully understand the meaning of how my faith connected my heart, head, and actions.

I've been interested in the idea of the necessity of relationship preceding and motivating lasting change in a person since back in high school. (I can say it that way now I'm half way through my college days). I found myself frequently disappointed with friends and acquaintances that never seemed to live up to my standards for them. I eventually realized that I had been unreasonably holding people with no commitment to follow Jesus responsible for abiding by a Christian moral code. “My standards.”

Without that relationship, though, there was no real reason for my friends to abide by standards other than the world's.

I realized that change in a person must occur from the inside-out, not the outside-in.

The idea of relationship before belief, behavioral, or even simple opinion change is certainly something that our generation values and expects. It is, for example, the principle of the organization Young Life, which seeks to reach out to teens by investing in their lives, in effect “meeting them where they are,” and *then* sharing the gospel. A relationship leads to mutual respect and love, which is the proper environment for sharing the gospel.

Once a person begins to grasp the meaning of the gospel and the love of God depicted therein and accepts the offer of a relationship with Christ, then the Holy

Spirit can begin its transformative work. Lasting behavioral change then occurs as one starts to follow Christ... not before!

This new generation is looking for a church body that is welcoming and extends the possibility of relationship and loving community to one and all. The idea of expecting new people to enter our doors living according to our standards, understanding our theology, or even knowing for what exactly they are searching, is unrealistic and unappealing. We are called to meet people where they are, as Jesus did with the marginalized, the searching, and the sinners. As 1 John 4:19 reminds us, we are called to love humbly as and because he first loved us.

Doing so represents the gospel for what it is: the transformative good news; something equally welcoming as it is welcome.

Corinne Hester

Good Morning! Thank you so much for having us come and speak this morning! And also, Happy Father's day! As I was brainstorming how to approach this "sermonette," I was also thinking fondly about my dad, who is the smartest, kindest, and goofiest man I know.

I remember one Friday night in high school when I ran down the stairs of our home to go out with some of my girlfriends. Dad was sitting in the den, peering out over his book as I galloped to the front door.

"Pumpkin," he said, "Where are you going? ...and WHAT are you wearing?"

"It's called a tube top, Dad," I said.

"A TUBE SOCK?! No daughter of mine is going to run around town wearing a TUBE SOCK as a shirt!"

Although at the time I was probably mortified by my Dad's old-fashioned fashion sense, these generational misunderstandings are quite humorous to me now.

In last week's sermon, when Rev. Cleghorn addressed the Church's loss of young people, I was again disturbed by what one might label "generational misunderstandings." These misunderstandings ultimately come from generalities. Historically, the newest generation is almost always generalized as young, crazy, radicals. What did the generation of "Builders" (those born before 1942) think of

the “Baby Boomers”? What did the “Baby Boomers” think of the members of “Generation X”?

Today, I stand before you as a proud member of “Generation Y” and I have decided that “Y” is the perfect letter for my generation. We are always asking “why.” In terms of the church, young people might ask: Why is the church so exclusive? Why do we have to worship in a sanctuary? Why can’t we praise God with an electric guitar?

Although I have asked these questions at times and although I might be young, crazy, and radical every now and then, I also radically disagree with some of these Generation Y generalities. Yes, we can praise God in a gymnasium with folding chairs...but I wouldn’t know what beauty is if I had not seen the stained glass patterns that dance across a sanctuary floor at sunset. Yes, we can praise God with an electric guitar...but I wouldn’t know the full glory of the resurrection if I didn’t hear a triumphant trumpet every Easter morning.

People tend to say that “change is a good thing”...but I’ll just come out and say it: Change is a scary thing. Some fear that the Church is losing its sense of tradition and solid foundation, while others fear that the church is too structured, rigid, and stuck in its ways.

In our scripture for today, Jesus takes the disciples out on a boat. This is not unusual, but what is significant is that Jesus suggests that they go to the “other side of the lake.” He is taking them into unknown territory. Once on the boat, Jesus decides to take a little cat nap but the disciples are not resting easy. They are traveling into the unknown and a storm hits. They cry out to Jesus, “Master, master, we are perishing!”

Perishing?! It is as if they have forgotten that Jesus is in the boat with them. Today, as the church moves into a time of great change, it is important not to generalize and widen our generational gaps. Though one generation may want to cry out, “Master, master, the church is perishing!” and another generation might want to cry out, “Master, master, the church is so anchored down!”...we are all still disciples, regardless of our generation. Ultimately, as we move into unknown territory, we must embrace our differences, learn to compromise, and remember that Jesus is always in the boat with us.

Hannah Pommersheim

First of all, let me say that I come to this conversation, not as a lifetime Presbyterian but instead as someone raised Catholic. Although I do own a two volume set of Calvin's Institutes which I hope lend me some legitimacy. "I'm not religious, I'm spiritual." I've heard this phrase uttered by many of my peers in conversation.

Many people say these because it is true; they are interested in theological exploration but disdain doctrine, which they see as uncompassionate. Sometimes people say this because it is safer, less controversial perhaps, than admitting their true religious affiliation. For others it provides a way of distancing themselves from the churches they grew up in or perhaps even the label of Christian they have grown uncomfortable with.

I'll admit I identify with this backlash against "being religious." I came to college disillusioned with religion in general. Growing up in South Dakota I was surrounded by many religious conservatives who I viewed as close-minded and often hateful. I didn't want to be associated with that particular political brand of Christianity. Saying I was spiritual was personal and did not invite immediate stereotypes. By avoiding the label of religious, I avoided people's generalizations about what I did and did not believe or support.

Luckily I came to Davidson where slowly I began to meet individuals who modeled the type of Christianity, the Gospel of social justice that I believed in and loved. They brought me back into the folds of the church and showed me that modern Christianity had more to offer than a set of rules and causes to rally against.

I am sure that to many of you, hearing a young person say they are merely spiritual might sound non-committal. In this day and age there are many reasons to be non-committal, to want to get away from the negative stereotypes of Christians. But to me spirituality also represents something else for the church. Originally, I think many young people associated spirituality with the ability to connect to the divine in all aspects of their lives. Spirituality represents a departure from a God only present on Sundays in a church to one that can be found in nature, in relationship, anywhere in the world.

I believe this is a good thing, a movement outward from the church to embrace God in all creation. Yet I think both extremes of the religious spiritual spectrum can be bad. There is a limit to spirituality. While it is wonderful to explore God out in the world, at some point there needs to be instruction for how to interact with

that world. This can be found in the Gospel and the church community. I believe living in community is an essential part of being Christian and this means accepting religiousness back into my life.

So then next time a friend casually asks me about my faith, I will answer religious. But I'll still have to include a brief caveat to explain that this means I am still open minded and loving. And it is because I am Christian that I am that way.

Sydney Kornegay

Like the other three speakers today, I'd like to address some of the generalities made about the younger generation in last week's sermon. In particular, I'd like to focus on one statement from one of the generational "experts" Rev. Cleghorn quoted:

"Younger Americans...don't always favor one-way, hierarchical communication (like long sermons)... Through U-tube, Twitter, Facebook and more, this generation expresses itself by creating its own new media as fast as it consumes it."

This statement really struck a note with me. As someone who grew up in a southern Presbyterian church, and now attend church in downtown Charlotte, I've been able to experience two very different styles of worship, or rather, "both sides of the lake." My church back home is your stereotypical frozen chosen. Their idea of an exciting percussion instrument... is a set of handbells. They try to add "soul" to our musical selection by swaying awkwardly to "Swing Low, Sweet Chariot," accompanied by an organ. My church in Charlotte, on the other hand, takes a Jimmy Hendrix for Jesus approach to worship.

Seeing the stark contrast between those two churches makes me wonder how a church like my church back home can appeal to the younger generation. How can it attract a group of people that is used to constant entertainment through the newest you tube video, wants to be in instant contact with all of their friends, and has the ability to choose and customize everything from their music playlist to their facebook page to their blog site.

First, I think there is a need to understand why we are drawn to all this "new media" in the first place. We aren't just looking for entertainment. We want these things to engage our sense of wonder, to provide us with something magical that we don't really understand but that we are fascinated by. In the same way, we're not just chatting and blogging and tweeting and texting because we're bored, but because we are longing for authentic connection with people, because we want to be included in some sort of community. And we customize and choose, because we want to feel like we have some sort of control over our lives.

Once the church understands that, it needs to stop trying to sell us the iGod. The iGod is sort of like the iPod. He or she is completely customizable, comes in your choice of skin color, can be ordered in either the politically conservative or liberal edition, and allows you your own personal set of spiritual beliefs. He fits in your pocket, and can be pulled out as a trump card to support your ideological stances, but then hidden away again as soon as he becomes too demanding. He is, in other words, very safe but very small.

The iGod is a product that our generation, and generations before us, has found is completely powerless to provide all of those things we are longing for. There is nothing about the iGod that inspires a sense of wonder or awe. As it says in Romans 1:23, when we create a personalized, convenient God, we “exchange the glory of the immortal God for images resembling mortal man.” Likewise, the iGod is powerless to provide community or relationship. If everyone is walking around with their own God, there is no means of reconciliation or connection with one another. Finally, the iGod is powerless to provide control over our lives. He can’t calm the storm any more than we can.

So if the church doesn’t offer us the iGod, what can it offer us? The real one. Remind of us the God who is big and mysterious and untameable. The one who, when Moses asks for his name, says I AM. I AM cannot be controlled or manipulated, cannot be summed up with a catchy brand name, personalized, and then packaged and sold to individuals. He is also a God who provides reconciliation in relationships, who calls us to form community amongst diverse groups of people. He is one who calls us to love one another, to care for the orphaned and the widow, to notice the vulnerable and the lonely. Finally, he is a God who, although he may seem distant at times, has the power to calm the storm.

In conclusion, there are some things the church can change in order to appeal to a younger generation, things like presenting God through different mediums and art forms. However, that doesn’t mean the church should personalize or change who it believes God is in order to make him appear more appealing. Doing so will only make God appear smaller and less relevant. Instead, it should seek to introduce us to the big and mysterious I AM, the God who instills in us a sense of wonder, who allows us to love and form community with people who are very different from us, and who has the power to calm the storm.