

1 John 1:1-2:2
John 20: 19-31
April 12, 2015
Hamilton Union Presbyterian Church

How is the experience of Jesus' resurrection from the dead to make the leap from the generation who personally walked with Jesus to the next generation who was "not there?" This is the question which threads through all the gospels; but is particularly present in John's Gospel.

For John and the other gospel writers the question is acute and very real. How does one pass on to a generation yet unborn, or in infancy, or who live beyond the pale of the message such an amazing yet difficult to accept proclamation? What makes the gospels so compelling to me is the sense of urgency and the very real fear that what means so much to one generation may mean nothing at all to the next.

In many ways we may identify with that first generation of believers. The faith which sustained us and led us to trust Jesus Christ to be our Lord and Savior way be the same; but the primary vehicle of faith, the church, is less and less viable. A generation is coming to adulthood whose parents did not "go to church" and for whom "the church" is either a bastion of narrow minded moralism or simply irrelevant. I frankly do not know which is worse. If you believe the studies and endless surveys the death of the church as we know it is at hand. Meanwhile church growth experts and denominational leaders urge us to change our ways on the assumption that if we change the way we do things the world will once again beat a pathway to our door. The message is almost this: if we change the outside we will be renewed on the inside. This seems like nonsense to me.

Nevertheless the reality is this: the church which we grew up in is, if not dying, then in a state of profound transition. We can view this change as friendly or unfriendly. If unfriendly, we can view the change as hostile and godless. We can blame the values of relativism and materialism. We can believe that if only we returned to the good old days all would be well. This view is represented by an Arizona legislator who recently proposed that Arizona require people to go to church as a means to restore moral values.

Another insidious response to the assumption that this change is hostile is resignation, which is a nice way of saying despair. This response accepts that we no longer have anything that another generation would want. Presbyterian churches are going the way of land line telephones and telephone books. We'll just muddle along until we run out of money and then close the doors. It is an option that many congregations take.

Let's agree today not to do that! Let's agree that there is something important about the faith we hold which is so valuable that we are motivated by a sense of holy urgency to pass the spark of the power of Jesus' death and resurrection to another generation. Let's assume that this is something God wants us to do; and if God wants us to do it, God will guide us and provide the spiritual resources for us to be faithful to this calling.

This is not such a wild idea. After all, the amazing fact is that the spark *did* jump from the generation of eyewitnesses to the next generation which was *not there*. Indeed, it has made the leap from one generation to the next for the past two thousand years. The great spiritual movements throughout the history of the faith—the monastic movement, the translating of the Bible into native languages, the Reformation, the great revivals, the

growth of Christian faith in places like China, Africa and the former Soviet Union to name a few examples are evidence of the spark of God's living presence which we call the Holy Spirit. Even in the United States there are vibrant communities of faith. They just don't happen to resemble the communities we grew up in.

I say these things because the spark is very much alive and is alive among us, *here, this morning, right now*. The task is not to copy what others are doing. The task is to identify who we are and feel an urgency to pass it on what God is placing on our hearts to those who are *not here*. They may be our neighbors or colleagues. They most certainly are our children and grandchildren. What is so important about our faith that we want another generation to receive?

For clues we can look to the opening lines of John's letter:

That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked at, and touched with our hands concerning the word of life—this this life was revealed; and we have seen it and testify to it, and we declare to you the eternal life which was in the Father and was revealed to us. We declare to you what we have seen and heard, so that you may have fellowship with us. Our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son, Jesus Christ. We write these things to you so that our joy complete.

I propose that you are here in part because, in some way the spark jumped from a previous generation and connected with you. How did that happen? In what way do you identify your spiritual life as encountering Jesus? What in your experience might be important to someone who is not here? What is so important in your life and our life together that is worth making available, and which we yearn to pass on to another generation? In short, what will complete our joy? Amen.