

**Judges 2: 6-10**  
**Romans 10: 9-17**  
**November 9, 2014**  
**Hamilton Union Presbyterian Church**

This morning we hear of a disturbing event in the history of Israel. It is told in one short statement:

That whole generation was gathered to their ancestors, and another generation grew up after them who did not know the Lord or the work he had done for Israel.

Friends, this not going to be a sermon about the lost generation, our decadent and materialistic culture, our reliance on economic and military power and the general decline of morality. For one, I believe that not only beauty but also ugliness is in the eye of the beholder.

This morning's message begins with a question. How could such a thing happen? How could a generation of believers who had personally experience God's leading into the land of promise leave behind a generation who knew nothing of God and what he had done in delivering their grandparents and parents from slavery and leading them to this rich and bountiful land? It seems incredible! Surely the writer exaggerates! Surely he is a spiritual zealot who is condemning a generation for not living up to his high moral standards!

Yet there is no emotionalism connected with this matter-of-fact statement. One generation dies and another comes who is ignorant of history. They are ignorant of the great epic story of deliverance, the trials and tribulations of the journey through wilderness. They are ignorant of the fact that there is a God who selected this people to witness to his power—not for his own egotistical reasons, but that through Israel *all peoples* would discover the love and grace of God.

The whole generation was gathered to their ancestors; and another generation grew up after them who did not know the Lord or the work he had done for Israel.

And yet, is this development really as unimaginable as it appears?

Consider this. For forty years the Israelites could do nothing but depend on God as they wandered in the wilderness. They needed to depend completely on God for food, water and protection. We may joke that the reason the journey took forty years is that the men refused to ask for directions; but the fact is that the wilderness journey was a great school of spiritual teaching and discipline. All wilderness journeys are God's school to teach us to trust in him and rely upon him for our every need. Without wilderness journeys what do we have to tell others who are lost in life with no guide but the deceptive and illusory promises of the world. Why do we resonate so much with the hymn, "Amazing Grace" if it is not the lines, "I once was lost, but now am found; was blind but now I see"?

And yet, once they crossed the Jordan River there was work to do. Seeds had to be planted. Houses needed to be built. They had to protect themselves against the tribes who did not appreciate being shoved out of their territory. Then as a result of their labor when their own crops were ready for harvest, the manna stopped. Now the feeding of Israel would come from their own labor. There would be long hours. There would be the cycles of drought and flood. There would be the ongoing care of livestock. They now would have to make their own clothes, tools and carts. What room was there in this life to think about the God who had liberated them from slavery and led them to this new land? No doubt there were cynics who observed that Israel had exchanged one form of slavery for another.

It makes perfect sense to me that there was thought to be no time to reflect on the great story of which they were a part. There was no time to gather in gratitude for the miracle that had taken place. There was no time to gather together to share with their children the great stories of creation, of Adam and Eve, Noah, Abraham and Sarah, the near sacrifice of Isaac and the births of Esau and Jacob and how Jacob came to be renamed Israel. There was no time to tell the story of Joseph and his being sold to slavery in Egypt and his rising to power to save Egypt and his very family from starvation. There was no time to tell about the brutal slavery which followed Joseph's death and the birth of Moses and his miraculous adoption into Pharaoh's very family! No time to talk of his escape to Midian and call to return by a burning bush which was not consumed; and of the plagues which finally convinced Pharaoh to let the people go. No time to tell of the parting of the Red Sea allowing the Israelites to cross to safety and no time to tell of the covenant God made with Israel on Mt. Sinai. No time. There was work to do. The work of the "real world."

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Is our time so much different than this time so long ago? Is our society so focused on making it in the so called "real" world that there is no time to gather to hear the stories of the greatness of God? Last spring MJ and I were playing a board game with a group of people. Among them was someone who was about to go to a prestigious law school. He was asked to name a book of the Bible and could not do it.

Friends, in every time of history there is a generation who does not know the Lord and the work he has done for humanity, not only through the history of the people of Israel but through his son, Jesus Christ.

Do we who believe and love this great story and feel it pulsing through our very blood not have compassion for the generation which believes that this world is all there is? Is there not a call to be a community that intentionally gathers around the story of God's love to deepen our own participation in the story and to invite our sisters and brothers to discover the God who not only worked in the past but is alive through the Holy Spirit today so that they enter into what Paul tells Timothy "the life that really is life"?

The same Paul writes to the Romans: How is this generation to call on one in whom they have not believed? And how are they to believe in one of whom they have never heard? And how are they to hear without someone to proclaim him? And how are they to proclaim unless they are sent?

If we do not tell the story, who will? If we do not intentionally gather to hear the great acts of God in the past so that we can live them in the present, who will? Oh, there are plenty of communities who will tell the story; but only we can tell it in our way through our experience. We cannot leave the sharing of the Good News to others. For there are members of the generation who do not know the Lord and the work he has done of all ages who God is even now preparing to hear the great story as only we can tell it. Amen.