

**Christ Presbyterian Church  
Edina, Minnesota  
June 8 & 9, 2013  
John Crosby  
Valuable: Young Graduates  
Joel 2:28-32**

Our mission as a church is to inspire all generations to follow Jesus, to love others, to live like life is a mission. We have been spending several weeks talking about how each generation—how each part of us—is valuable. That is what we are calling the series, Valuable. There is not only a place for you here, but you are needed here. At the beginning we talked about how often women hear that and yet their experience in church has been that they are here to do the work and to keep quiet. Debbie Manning talked about how if she is really valuable, then the gift of leadership ought to be extended to women. In the same way, we talked about how we want singles to feel a part of our community. Thirty to 40 percent of us are single and yet too often, the church can make people feel like spare parts. Rich Phenow used the Memorial Day weekend to interview a World War II veteran, who talked about how his experiences as a prisoner of war not only shaped his life but his faith. That was a gift to all of us. Just this last week Dan Anderson talked about the children, how they are not the church of the future, they are the church right now but only if we make them feel like they are never too young to do awesome things for God.

I think each of those are helpful, but I've got to tell you, I think today's group is the hardest. I think it is the toughest to value young adults, often because young adults can be unsettling to us. They like different music. They dress differently. They look different. The way they talk is almost incomprehensible. It can be a maddening experience when they go to college at great expense and come back and the expenses continue. There is for the young adult and the older part of the congregation a sense that both think the other may be out of touch. For many of us, the emergence of young competent adults among us can be a little threatening. It is a visible reminder that our time is closer to the end than the beginning. And while young adults are not trying to push us off stage, they are a reminder that we are mortal so there is a little disconnect there. I'd like to say that we need young adults desperately, and the young adults desperately need God. I'd like to pray the same prayer at the beginning as at the end of our time together today. Let's pray.

Lord Jesus, what would we be able to say here that would inspire a young adult to follow You with passion and not walk away from the church, so the church might actually *be* the hope of the world to young people? What would inspire us as older adults to take a chance on these young, brash, know-it-alls with no track record and all that confidence? How do we make more than just a space for young adults, God? Teach us. Amen.

I have long known that the raising of adolescents into young adults as part of a Christian community is a challenging thing. For ten years I worked as a youth worker and then a youth pastor in a church in Chicago. Had a great youth ministry there and then after some years, I came to CPC. Recently the staff here went down in Chicago for a conference and I thought to

save money, I would ask some of the elders in that church to put us up during the conference and they graciously opened their homes to us. Several of the staff were staying at a home where the parents were gone for the weekend and so they had the whole house. Late one night after being at the conference all day, they came home and saw a light on in the garage. They opened the door to the garage to turn off the light and smoke just came billowing out. They looked in through the smoke and saw a bunch of young adults, young men. One of the staff said, "Hey, guys, do you live here?" And one young man goes, 'Oooooohh, yeaaaah," and the smoke took on a different flavor altogether. He said, "Yeah, I live here." The staff said, "Well, your parents said we could stay here for a conference. We're here with John Crosby." John Crosbeeeeey! Oh, that's great. He was my youth pastor." And another one goes, "Yeah, he baptized me, man. I was in his Bible study. Whatever happened to him? Do you want to come in?" Our youth staff here has never let me forget my ability as a discipler of the next generation.

We often do not think of young adults in the front row of the church. We more often think of young adults as a flashier version that is somehow different from us and that we are not quite sure how to figure out. Time magazine did an article that Matt [Matt Moberg, Co-Director of The Table] pointed out to me about this young generation, the Millennials, 17 or 18 to the early 30s. It is important to remember that this is said to be the me-me-me generation. Where do they get that? Remember the Baby Boomers, their parents? They were called the me generation, and they taught their children to be the me-me-me generation. So often when we think of young adults, that's part of what we think about, entitled, often spoiled young adults, their parents on steroids. Totally connected socially through internet and Facebook and Twitter and all these other things that I don't understand. Connected not just to the world but really connected to each other. They are the most connected generation in history but they are connected only to their peers. They live in a fishbowl of people just like them. They are just as likely to live at home with their parents as they are to be married. And in many, many ways, the me-me-me generation is leaving the church in record numbers.

It has been a pattern in America that when you go away, whether it is to college or for your first job, a lot of times you sort of take a vacation from church. That happens through college into the job until you meet somebody, and then usually you go back to church to get married. That may spark something but it may not. Then when you have kids, you tend to return to the church. That is not happening with young adults in anything like the numbers that it has for previous generations.

Many books that I read have been focused on this, what a new generation really thinks about Christianity. They talk about the leaving of the church by young adults. One author said they love Jesus but not the church. Here are seven reasons why young adults are leaving the church.

1. Unchristian.
2. No two leavers have exactly the same reasons but there are some patterns. There are the post-moderns. Post-modern young adults reject the church and often Christianity because it seems so exclusive. "The way, the truth, the life. That sounds too narrow to me."
3. Others leave because they have been hurt. They recoil because the church has hurt them. They have suffered abuse at the hands of someone they had thought of as a spiritual authority.
4. Or one of their friends was hurt. God is guilty by association.

5. There is a group of them called modernists who go away to school and are convinced that the supernatural is unnatural, that science and politics and sociology should be able to explain all of life and that the miraculous is a fairy tale.
6. There is a group who, frankly, are spiritual rebels. They leave the church or flee the faith to indulge in behavior that is incompatible with what is talked about here, and they don't mind that. They value their autonomy and they don't want anyone to tell them what to do, not even a superintending God, who seems so old-fashioned.
7. Then probably the biggest group of these folks who have left the church are just drifters. It is not an intellectual crisis. It is not pain. They don't even consciously leave. They just stop coming. They drift away. Over time church and often the God that that church represents seem so much less relevant, like it's a disconnect to their real lives.

I've got to tell you, there are still tons and tons and tons of young followers of God, young followers of Jesus, and many of them come to CPC. We had thousands come to the Upper Room, hundreds at The Table. We have hundreds of young adults who serve in our Student Ministries and lead kids to Christ. But even in this community, there are miles to go before we can say that we inspire all generations. Where else can they go?

Might I just suggest that in life there are different paths. I think that the Bible talks about those paths, and one of the people who talk about them most fiercely is Joel. Joel is a prophet. The prophets say, "Don't go down that path. It's ruined. You'll kill us all if you go down that path. Choose this other path. If you go to ruin, it's over, but if you turn, maybe God will help us." Speaking to old people and young people and all people in between, Joel has something to say to our church. I'm tempted to read just the good part, the part that talks about young people, but this part of the Bible only makes sense if you realize that it is an oracle, a vision of judgment. You need the good and the bad to balance each other out. First the judgment. Joel says [chapter 2],

**1** Blow the trumpet in Zion; sound the alarm on my holy hill. Let all who live in the land tremble, for the day of the LORD is coming. It is close at hand— **2** a day of darkness and gloom, a day of clouds and blackness. Like dawn spreading across the mountains a large and mighty army comes, such as never was of old nor ever will be in ages to come. **3** Before them fire devours, behind them a flame blazes. Before them the land is like the garden of Eden, behind them, a desert waste—nothing escapes them.

**11** . . . The day of the LORD is great; it is dreadful. Who can endure it?

That judgment. "If you go down this path . . ." but then Joel says,

**12** "Even now," declares the LORD, "return to me with all your heart, with fasting and weeping and mourning." **13** Rend your heart and not your garments. Return to the LORD your God, for he is gracious and compassionate, slow to anger and abounding in love, and he relents from sending calamity. **14** Who knows? He may turn and relent and leave behind a blessing—grain offerings and drink offerings for the LORD your God.

Now the good part where the kids come in,

**27** Then you will know that I am in Israel, that I am the LORD your God, and that there is no other; never again will my people be shamed. **28** "And afterward,

Hundreds and hundreds of years before Jesus,

I will pour out my Spirit on all people. Your sons and daughters will prophesy, your old men will dream dreams, your young men will see visions. **29** Even on my servants, both men and women, I will pour out my Spirit in those days.

**32** And everyone who calls on the name of the LORD will be saved . . . .

“I will pour out My Spirit on *all* of them, and all who call on the Name of the Lord will be saved.” To be saved means to turn away from the disaster. There are dreams that warn and visions that talk and voices that call out but unless all the voices are heard, then something is missing. Someone doesn’t get spoken to. The very first time that the apostle Peter talks about what will become the church [Acts, chapter 2], he says,

**16** . . . this is what was spoken by the prophet Joel: **17** " 'In the last days, God says, I will pour out my Spirit on all people.

All people, young and old alike. If it only comes to the old, we are in trouble because it says,

Your sons and daughters will prophesy,

That means they will tell the truth.

your young men will see visions . . . .

They will see the future. They will not be threatened by the future the way old people are. They will jump into the future instead of tiptoeing, “I am old. I am wise. I am cautious. I want to try things out.” They jump, the only way to get there. They jump! The work of the Holy Spirit comes to us all or some of us get left behind. I thought I could talk about that today in two ways. The first way and probably the best is to ask one of my friends, who is a young adult to come up and share with you. His name is Matt Moberg. Last year Matt worked on our high school staff and this year he and Steph Spencer are taking over from Brad Jackson in our Sunday evening community, The Table. He is obviously a little bit younger than I am. When I asked him if he wanted to wear a robe also, I can’t quite describe the look on his face but he said it was intimidating. I want you to hear from him. He doesn’t speak for all young adults, but I want to talk with him about some of what might make it hard for young adults to thrive in this church, so that’s where I would start.

*(John:)* Matt, why do you think it is difficult for young adults to stay part of the church community?

*(Matt:)* That’s a difficult question. There are so many reasons. As John just said, I’m not the ambassador for all things young. I’m really not the voice of the young necessarily because there are so many different reasons. What we’ve found out, what most people are saying, is that they find the church to be judgmental, shallow, hypocritical, intolerant . . . .

*(John:)* Don’t sugarcoat it, Matt. You can say what you really think.

(Matt:) No, I'm going to stop there, but I read an article, an essay. It was a blog but essay sounds a little more professional. It was by one of my favorite theologians, Richard Beck. He wrote about how Facebook is killing the church. It's really a fascinating idea because for the young adult generation, it's our connection. We grew up on Facebook. We grew up on iGram, Instagram, Twitter. We're always connected to each other. Because of that, we don't need to come to the church for social affiliations. You know, historically the church has kind of been this place in the middle of town where people have come to talk about the Vikings and the Bears, and I guess for you to talk about kids and what's going on in your life and do you want to get together at some point this week, all these things. In my life now, I know what my friends had for dinner last night. I just know because they post pictures of it. We're always talking to each other. It's not that we need to go to church to get our community. The reality is and historically, too, we're not the first generation to fuss about the church. I think we just have the luxury now of where we can walk away a little bit because we have community outside of church. We don't have this obligation to be here any more if our sole purpose is for the community.

(John:) There's a lot there.

(Matt:) There's a lot there, sorry. What did you say, my talk is incomprehensible?

(John:) Wouldn't you love a whole sermon like that?

(Matt:) Tonight. Seven o'clock. Come and join us.

(John:) Their sign on the door says, if the music is too loud, you're too old but come in anyway. I think that one of the things that Matt has done for me is to validate the struggle that young adults have with church as usual, business as usual. But I think he shares my conviction that God spoke to Joel, saying His Spirit would come down on *all* of us so that young people as well as older people, all generations, would be connected to the work of God. I would be interested in maybe one or two of the things, Matt, that you think Joel is going to say to the young people tonight about how they connect.

(Matt:) When you look at young adults and the Scripture of Joel and the talk that they ought to be the ones with prophetic words and visions, those are both futuristic. You are bringing us into the next chapter, but the problem is that young adults don't stick around in church very often to bring forth those visions and bring forth the future. So we are in a bit of a crisis now, right? Cause what happens to a world that has no visionaries and has no people asking, what's next? You just start dreaming. You reflect on the past and the present, you're not actually evolving and moving forward. John did a great job of highlighting the problem when he said we are so in love with ourselves. My generation probably loves ourselves more than we love Jesus if we are honest. When we look at generations of old, the early church, sacrificial martyrs, or modern history, Dietrich Bonhoeffer and Martin Luther King, these men who were chasing after holiness, who were chasing after living out God's call in their lives, it cost them. But when things get hard for our generation, we don't want to stick around long enough for the visions to come forth so I think that's the biggest thing that I've been thinking about as I read that text.

(John:) So the Spirit not only draws us together but gives us visions and dreams that we will not live out unless we stick around. I like that. I guess I would also ask you, Matt, what are one or two things that you think we might do as a community, not just to have kids sitting in the pew, not just to have young adults sitting here, but to have them engaged in the community?

(Matt:) That's really tough. I think the No. 1 place to start, though, is having dialogues instead of always having monologues. What I mean by that is, we come in here so often and we are spoken to and we are told what to do. We're never asked, "How are you?" and "What's going on in your life?" and "What do you think?" So we're spending our lives in places where we are connected with others and where we are having *great* dialogues. It's incongruent to our lives to come to a church where we're just *spoken to* and not *spoken with*. I think it's tough for older generations because we are brash. We are loud. We are arrogant, and we really do love ourselves.

(John:) Welcome to my world.

(Matt:) Yeah, this is John and me all the time. But even taking into account that we are all these things, there is still good in our generation. There are a lot of good things happening in our generation. For example, we are the most educated generation that has come into America so far. For the first time, every year women are getting more bachelor's degrees than men. Women are taking on more leadership in our generation. We are seeing innovation. We are seeing technological advances, all these wonderful things that are happening. So, yes, arrogant, brash, loud, uncomfortable at times, admittedly so, but there is still goodness. I think that if we can all join in the conversation, it becomes real.

(John:) Could I just pick up on that, Matt, before you sit down. If young adults are to feel like they have a place here, it will not be because I stand up front and invite them in the door. It will be because *you* have tried to dialogue. Ask the questions, "What did you think about what John and Matt said?" Find a young adult and engage him or her in a dialogue that makes them feel like they are valued, like they have something to offer, but also feel like they need you and you need them. Matt and I joked a little during the talk last night. He said, "I disagree with something John said," and after I went through in my mind my short list of people who might replace him, I thought, this is the gift that God offers our church. When the young and the not so young spend time *with* one another, God will bless both. I am praying that God will bless people, a lot of people, through Matt. Thank you.

(Clapping.)

I believe we need to be becoming a new kind of people, not a break-it-and-throw-it-away kind of new. As we evolve, we need to find ways that young people can catch the vision that the Holy Spirit has given them and stick around long enough to share it with us so we can learn together. I believe we need young adults and I believe that young adults desperately need the church. Not just that they need God, not just that they need Jesus, I believe they desperately need the church. As bad as the church is, I believe when the Spirit is there, that over time it is a community where people can learn the service that he talked about. They can learn humility. They can learn that God loves them from the inside out. You can't learn that when you're

nineteen years old. You barely believe it when you are 27. Hang around long enough with World War II veterans and you get a sense of what humility looks like.

I love this quote about how to have a church that is more than one generation. There was a slave trader named John Newton, who became a follower of Jesus and wrote *Amazing Grace*. He became a minister in England. One of his young proteges was named William Wilberforce. Wilberforce grew up wanting to kill the slave movement in England. Over the years Newton had a profound influence on him. At the end of his life, this is how John Newton described himself. "When I was young, I was sure of many things. Now there are only two things of which I am sure. One is that I'm a miserable sinner and the other, that Christ is an all-sufficient Savior. He is well taught who learns these two lessons." I believe that we desperately need to learn that. I believe that young people desperately need to learn that so that God's Spirit can come on us all.

I said I was going to offer you a couple of ways we need young adults in the church and how we might make that happen. The first is Matt. The second is three minutes long. It's a video of a young friend of mine. It was put together for our Sunday night worship service, The Table.

*(Video is shown.)*

That was three years ago. Max was a medical student, and now The Table has a group of young adults, mostly young women, who buy blankets and food and go out into the streets of Minneapolis. Not because that's what their church does. Not because there is a special program for that, but because they are followers of Jesus and the Spirit has told them to look for those that nobody else looks at. That is why we need young adults. Let me ask you to think of a young adult that you might talk to about faith or life, yours *and* theirs. Let's pray.

Lord, we said we were going to pray the same thing now so I'd ask You, Jesus, what would inspire young adults to follow You with passion and not either abandon the local church or just become religious? What would inspire them so that we might, all of us, be the hope of the world? I pray that Your Spirit would fall in fresh ways on young and old alike. I pray that young adults would hear other people talking with them. I pray that You would lift up work that needs to be done that inflames the heart and that young adults would jump because that would inspire an older adult to take a chance on these young know-it-alls. How do we make more than a space for their visions? Lord, I pray today that You would let us hear the voices of young visionaries that come from You and jump with them. I pray that You would not keep us safe but that You would take us off the map, that our hearts might love the children that You have given us and all the other children out there. Come to us again, Lord Jesus, old and young alike. In the Name of the Father and the Son and the Spirit. Amen.

*The nature of oral presentations makes them less precise than written materials; any lack of attribution is unintentional, and we wish to credit all those who have contributed to this sermon. Soli Deo Gloria.*