

“THE EXPERIENCE OF YOUTH”

Readings: Isaiah 6:6-8

I Timothy 4:11-16

BEFORE WE PROCEED to the communion service, I think a few words are in order. First of all, congratulations to our confirmands. You guys are awesome and I hope you know that the entire congregation, not just Char and myself, are behind you one hundred percent. Second, congratulations to you parents for sticking with the program and making sure the kids made it to class each Sunday, if not “bright-eyed and bushy-tailed,” then at least bleary-eyed and sleep deprived. Third, congratulations to Char, who despite juggling her duties as seminary student, part-time pastor, mother and wife, somehow managed to shepherd everyone across the finish line.

The fact that we have thirteen young people who are willing to unite us in the ministry of this church, is no small feat, especially for a denomination that has the dubious distinction of being the first religious community in the country with an average membership age of 65. The graying of our denomination does not bode well for First Church, for Protestantism or for the Church of Jesus Christ in general. This is a trend our congregation can and must reverse, if we intend to extend our mission into the twenty-first century.

In order to do that however, we have to be willing to both listen to today’s youth and let them take the lead in certain areas of ministry. This of course, is precisely what the Apostle Paul did in today’s Epistle lesson. Even though Timothy was young, untested, and prone to some crazy ideas, Paul didn’t hesitate to put him in a leadership position, admonishing him to, “Let no one despise your youth.” In other words, to Paul’s way of thinking, Timothy’s youth was an asset rather than a liability.

Confirmation Sunday reminds us that we too, have to stop looking at our young people as a liability. Sure there's always risk involved in turning the church over to the next generation, but then again, what good is a church that's unwilling to take risks? The last thing we need around here is a bunch of Christians committed to living by the words of the eleventh commandment—"thou shalt not go out on a limb."

When I was in seminary there was a contentious fight among the trustees about whether a student should have a seat on the board. Many of the old timers said, "No," citing the fact that the students had "no experience." But then my theology professor stood up and said, "What about the experience of youth? Doesn't that count for something?"

Today, I want to say to the members of the class of 2010, that the experience of youth doesn't only count for something, it counts for a lot—especially in the eyes of Jesus, who died at the tender age of 32. The church today needs the qualities that only young people can bring—energy, compassion, adaptability, and laughter.

Saint Benedict said, "God often shows what is better to the younger." I believe that. I also believe in you guys. Believe in yourselves. Believe in Jesus. Help us save this tottering, old church, so prone to play it safe. Renew it with your energy, creativity, and compassion. God will bless you, and those of us still around, you can be sure, will sing your praises.

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