

Full Circle: A Generations Dance Sermon

By Rev. Heather Concannon

February 16, 2020

So as everyone goes back to their seats
I want us to hold in our minds
What it felt like to see all the different ages, generations
Dancing... how much the music has changed over the years
And how much has stayed the same...

Friends, this is my third time doing the Generations dance with all of you
Here at UUAC
We've done it every other year since I arrived,
And this year, for the first time, I both removed and added a generation.
And I will be honest,
I thought long and hard about those of you here
Those of you I know and love
Those of you I see in the pews Sunday after Sunday
When I removed the Greatest Generation
And it was not without a moment of great tenderness
And some amorphous feelings of loss,
That I removed the Greatest Generation from my script.

The Greatest Generation (or the GI generation)
describes the generation of Americans
who grew up during the deprivation of the Great Depression,
and then went on to fight in World War II.
Many of those who survived the war then went on
to build and rebuild United States industries in the years following the war.

Those people are all ages 95 or older
And the elders I could think of who would be present today
Were born after 1925
The very oldest of the Silent Generation
But not of the Greatest Generation.
But it was a tender thing,
to remove them from our generations dance
Because in a small way, it felt like the end of an era
A marker of how time is passing,
A reminder of those we have loved and lost.

And yet, on Thursday,
When our worship team was planning out this generations dance
I said to Sarah, "should I really play Baby Shark for the whole Generation Z?
Isn't that song not quite "iconic" for someone born in 1997?"
And she pointed out that, perhaps, it was time to add the newest generation to our list.

And this is the way it is, friends,

With time passing
Each of us getting older
Our beloved elders becoming ancestors
And new members of the human family joining our midst
At a rate of 2.5 million babies born globally each week.

And it is a tender thing,
Time passing,
Generations passing away
And new generations coming in to the world
Because each of us can look back
And remember those in our lives who have become ancestors
And each of us can look forward
And realize that one day in the future, each of us in this room will be ancestors.

And in the world we live in now, in 2020,
We are too often isolated from the gift of knowing—really knowing
Our ancestors
Or our descendants
Those who have come before, and those who will come after us,
Because we are more age segregated now than we have ever been.

Age segregation is a relatively recent phenomenon,
Largely stemming from the industrialization era.
Fueled by rise of the nuclear family, especially in regards to housing
And our intensely age-based schooling system
It is now so intense that many Americans are able to go about their daily lives
Without interacting with anyone more than 10 years older or younger than them
And more likely, if we are under 22, only a year or two difference.

But research also shows that for people at all life stages, in all generations,
meaningful relationships with people much older or much younger
than us creates significant benefits to our wellbeing.
It disrupts prejudice,
Creates a greater sense of shared community, and understanding of one another's needs,
And gives opportunities to see the world through a different lens.

And so, friends,
Today let us honor our ancestors and elders
And our children and descendants
Knowing that each of us have held or will hold both roles in our lifetimes,
By calling to mind those relationships across generations that have shaped, inspired, and
transformed us.

Now, by ancestors and elders, I don't mean biological—though they could be
And I don't necessarily mean people who have passed away,
I mean those people who have helped to shape you, to guide you

Who were here before you with long years of learning and growing and struggling and loving and
messing up
Long before you showed up,
And had some hard earned perspective, experience, and wisdom from what they have lived through.

I'd like to invite you to think of someone specific who is significantly older than you
Someone who you feel fondly toward, perhaps someone you love
They could be a mentor, a friend, a family member, a family friend
Someone who perhaps has now become an ancestor
Or someone who is still alive.
You only have to think of one person, but I know you likely have several.
And if you feel comfortable, close your eyes,
And let their beloved face come into your mind's eye,
Let yourself remember one or two things about them
An expression, a mannerism,
A conversation you had that impacted you,
And consider:
What lessons have they taught you?
What do you admire about them?
What did they know from their longer life that helped you to live yours better, or more fully?
How has your relationship with them broadened your perspective?
And if you'd like, I invite you to call their name into this space.

(Pause for several moment)

And now I invite us to consider our descendants,
And by descendants,
I don't necessarily mean the children we raise, though it could be,
But I mean those who will come after us
Those for whom we lay the groundwork, with hope and faith.
Those who may be in our lives,
Or who may be yet to be born,
Who offer us a sense of newness, perspective, who challenge or question the ideas we have come to
accept as "just the way things are", who are taking up the mantles of projects we once long labored
over, and are now ready to move on from.

And now, I invite you to think of someone specific, who is significantly younger than you
Someone who you feel fondly toward, perhaps someone you love
They could be a child or an adult, a friend, a family member, a family friend
Again, you only have to think of one person.
And with your eyes still closed,
And let their beloved face come into your mind's eye,
Let yourself call to mind one or two things about them
An expression, a mannerism,
A conversation you had that impacted you,
And consider:
What lessons have they taught you?
What do you admire about them?

What do they challenge you on, or shown you that you've accepted a status quo as "the way things are"—in a way that has helped you to live yours better, or more fully?
How has your relationship with them broadened your perspective?
And, if you are so moved, I invite you to call their name into this space.

Friends, one of the many gifts
Of being a part of a multigenerational community such as this
Is that I find that my perspective is widened every day.
I feel so, so lucky that I get to be a part of a community
Where talking to people in every generation is part of my life.
The perspective I gain on what is important in life
On how much I've grown since I was younger
And how much I still have to grow
I am grateful for it every day.
I invite each of us to celebrate the ways in which we have been blessed
By relationships across the generations
And to honor and express gratitude
For the gifts that those relationships have given us.

May it be so, and amen.