

Isaiah 40:27-31
1 Peter 5:5-6
May 21, 2023

Lessons for the Young
(and for the rest of us too)

It is youth Sunday, a time to acknowledge the younger members of our *koinonia* family of faith for the milestones they have achieved, and to speak of the lessons appropriate for the young as they transition into adulthood. For the rest of us, the day can serve as a reminder of those lessons.

When I was in high school, I thought the 1950's were ancient history. After all, it *had* been twenty years. Presently, my high school experience is more than forty years past. Even the 1990s is more distant to us now, than the 1950s were then.

Back then, we were fighting the Cold War. It gave us a shared purpose, a common identity, and also, strangely enough, a belief in a better future. The young people of today are telling us they are not so sure about the future.

The future looks different to the young because, among other things, they are much more likely to live through it. When I speak the 22nd century, for instance, it is a conversation piece, it is a hypothetical notion. Yet today's high school graduates, if they live to be ninety-five or so, it will be reality.

The climate crisis, for instance, looks different to those who will suffer it if the science is right, than it does to those who can say, "it is not our problem, we won't be

around then anyway." I think of how hard it is to predict the future.

I think back to high school again and all the things my generation did not foresee. My generation did not foresee the end of the cold war. We were told it would last forever. Who knows, maybe it will return, but things did not turn out the way the prognosticators said it would. And there is no sense whatever that we saw the technological advancements; the internet and smart phones, and all the rest.

And that leads me to one of the other phenomena of the present that threatens the future. One of the greatest perils the young of today will face in their lifetimes is the breakdown of community, caused by the depersonalization of relationships, resulting in isolation, an epidemic of loneliness. The present generation faces an uncertain future, a rather chaotic present, and it perhaps tempted to create for themselves a revered past, or to throw in the towel and live for oneself.

In the past, people got together incidentally, as a matter of course. It is true now, but the incidental nature of community life is being diminished. In this industrial technological age, we have been separated by air travel, interstates, and technology, such as television, smart phones, social media, AI? In the future, people will have to decide to seek relationships with each other.

It is with these kind of considerations in mind that we hear from the prophet Isaiah. His generation also found an uncertain future, a chaotic present, and were tempted to create for themselves a revered past. In the 40th chapter, we find these words;

“Why do you say, O Jacob;
and complain, O Israel,
‘My way is hidden from the Lord,
and my cause is disregarded by my God?’”

Although it is in a sense understandable, given the problems we face, a closer look reveals this as a silly question. Our way is not hidden from the Lord . . . it is hidden from us! We are the ones who can’t see two steps ahead. Because we do not see, it appears that *God doesn’t care*, and that is the first of the lessons . . . *that God cares*:

“Do you not know?
Have you not heard?
The Lord, is the everlasting God,
the creator of the heavens and the earth;
He will not grow tired or weary
and his understanding . . . no one can fathom.”
God gives strength to the weary
and increases the power of the weak.
Even the young grow tired and weary
and the young people stumble and fall;

This calls for *humility*, the second of the lessons, which is the word of the day from 1 Peter, in the instructions, of all people, to the young, we hear these

words, “. . . clothe yourselves with humility towards one another because, ‘God opposes the proud, but gives grace to the humble.’” Part of what humility means is that we admit that we do not know what will happen in the future, and that we are somewhat powerless before it.

The message of Isaiah also came to a people undergoing rapid change and unable to predict their future. Things simply did not go the way they had planned. Even their prophets turned out to be largely wrong, especially when they told them that the revered past would return. Surely by now we have learned to disregard that message.

Another part of what humility means is to be humble before the mystery and majesty of God. The great discoveries of the emerging Jewish faith, which also became a prominent part of the Christian faith, is that the most treasured possession we have is each other, all of us, the whole human race.

They discovered that life goes on after catastrophe, and that it is still good, very much worth living. The richest part of life is to be found in relationships with people, all different kinds of relationships; cross-cultural, multiethnic, with people of other faiths; I am not talking about romance, but friendship.

“You shall love the Lord your God with a your heart and soul and strength, and you shall Love your neighbor as yourself,” are not mere slogans. This insight means that the people which whom we share

this life are more important than being right, than winning, than any kind of success. Let us think of unselfish love as the third lesson of the day.

Do not despair. Respect everyone. Honor the lasting things from our shared history. Do not live merely for yourself but for the human community. Always know that God wills that we do better, we can do better; always practice kindness and graciousness, mercy and reconciliation and goodness;

Do not be deceived into thinking there will come a generation that is not vulnerable, one whose failures will end it all, or whose successes will save it all. Rather wait . . . this is the fourth great lesson . . . *wait for the Lord*; I think that is enough for the day. Believe that God cares and be humble, practice unselfish love and patiently await the action of God; another word for patient waiting, in hope, for we have been promised:

“For they whose hope is in the Lord
shall renew their strength.
They will soar on the wings of eagles;
They will run and not be weary,
they will walk and not faint.”

That promise was made to the generation which faced Babylonian captivity and the barrenness of the return from exile, to the generation which suffered the world wars and the great depression and the nuclear crisis, and it is promised to us too, and to all who come after us. Faith, humility, love, and hope . . . let this be the lessons of the day.

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