

“Generation Gap” – Pr Jim Sprengle – Christmas 1 December 31, 2023

- I. **Luke 2:30-31** – “for my eyes have seen Your salvation, that You have prepared in the presence of all peoples.”
- II. **In certain parts of India, people don’t build bridges, they grow them.**
 - a. Northwest India receives more rain than anywhere on earth.
 - b. The mountains in those areas have a world record - 86 feet of rain in a year
 - i. And you thought the Northwest was rainy!
 - c. The problem for people living in that area is that most of the rain falls during the monsoon season, and the slow creeks become raging rivers... and way too dangerous to cross.
 - i. So, villagers in this area have an amazing commuter bridge system that probably dates back thousands of years.
 - ii. To stay connected between villages, they need bridges... but they can’t build them with wood because it rots with all the moisture and humidity... and concrete and steel are out of the question because it’s too remote.
 - d. One tribe of people came up with an ingenious solution... living bridges.
 - i. What they do is plant a strangler tree on the riverbank... and after it grows big enough, they take part of its root system from the ground.
 - ii. They spend many years cultivating and coaxing these roots to cross spans of up to 100 feet.
 - iii. Once they get to the other side, they bury them into the riverbank until they anchor the bridge from both sides of the valley or gorge.
 - iv. Finally, they put mud down as a walking path along the bridge, and they are open for business.
 - v. These walkways are so strong that they can support 50 travelers at a time, and so durable they last for centuries.
 - e. Here’s the interesting part... it takes so long to grow one of these bridges that the work must be passed along to future generations... as many people don’t even get to see a completed bridge in their lifetimes.
 - i. The work must be passed on to children, who learn how to take care of these strangler trees and how to direct their growth.¹
 - f. In a way, the living bridges of India not only span the gap of valleys and gorges, but also the generation gap between young and old.
- III. **All of us experience the generation gap throughout life.**
 - a. Some people don’t like it, but we have names for the different generations:
 - i. The Silent Generation, The Greatest Generation, the Baby Boomer Generation, Generation X, the Millennial Generation, Generation Z, and the latest, Generation Alpha.
 - b. Do you ever think of the kinds of things that caused problems between different generations in the past?

- i. For example, what kind of music did the Greatest Generation (born in the 1920's and 30's) listen to that really irked their parents?
 - 1. Oh wait, I can ask some of you directly! I can see some of you listening to Bing Crosby or Frank Sinatra and your parents just shaking their heads.
 - ii. How about the 1950's and Elvis Presley and Chuck Berry... or heaven forbid the 1960's with too many musicians to name, but it became known for the hippies, the sexual revolution, and people protesting wars for the first time.
 - iii. I can't spend all day going through the rest of our gaps here, but it's safe to say that every generation looks at the ones before or after them and don't understand... or don't agree with their values or lifestyles.
- c. How does this generation gap affect the Gospel and our Christian faith?
- i. What was church like 50 years ago? 20 years ago? Today?
 - ii. When you think about it, a big shift has taken place in more traditional congregations, as young people and their families have migrated to community or mega churches, or don't come to church at all.
 - iii. "Where are all the young people?" is the question people ask... and we wonder if there is a generation gap.
- d. The wonderful truth of God's plan is that He uses every generation for His purpose and love... and He bridges the gap with Jesus.

IV. **Today's Gospel gives us a beautiful picture of different generations.**

- a. Think of all the generations represented in our passage:
 - i. Simeon was probably getting up there in age, even though it doesn't say how old... we assume he was nearing the end of his life before he saw Jesus.
 - ii. Anna the prophetess was 84... which in those days was very old.
 - iii. We have Joseph, perhaps in his 30's or 40's, along with Mary, who was probably a teenager.
 - iv. Finally, the baby Jesus was there, just a little over 5-weeks old.
- b. So, in this story, were Simeon and Anna of no consequence?
 - i. No! They were highly respected and obviously loved the Lord and all His ways – especially considering that they were given the privilege of seeing Jesus as a baby – and they knew He was the Savior.
 - ii. Time and time again, the weakest, the smallest, the oldest, the youngest, or the most unlikely person is given the Lord's blessing to carry out His work.
- c. We can lament the fact that gray hairs abound in our church, or we can praise God that He works through all generations!
 - i. The gift of Jesus Christ is the living Vine that bridges all generations.

- ii. As we feel the gap and distance between those older and younger, Jesus sees the great connections... and the power coming from people with different experiences and with different gifts.
- d. No, we may not all be together in the same room, but for those who are here, Jesus connects us no matter our culture or background – no matter our age or experience.

V. **The living Vine, Jesus Christ, is the focus and connector of our lives.**

- a. Consider the group that came to the temple that day... it was all about Jesus.... He brought them there, and He connected them.
- b. We often say things like “Jesus is the reason for the season” as we try to help people focus on Jesus in the days leading up to Christmas... and that is very good because the salvation of the world is all about Him!
- c. When we think about the infant Jesus coming into the world, we envision a spotlight shining down from above on the baby in the manger.
 - i. All the angels and the heavenly host were focused on the one thing that could break the power of sin and evil... it was a celebration because God finally sent the Redeemer of His people.
 - ii. As Simeon’s prayer says, “for my eyes have seen Your salvation, that You have prepared in the presence of all peoples,” (vss 30-31) and emphasis is, “all” peoples.
 - 1. The young, the old, and every generation are part of the plan of salvation, because we all need Jesus... we all need the forgiveness of sins.
- d. There is no generation gap in the Gospel, only living connections.

VI. **Churches often ask, “How do we attract more young people?”**

- a. That’s a fair question, but it presumes that we are trying to set up a program... or maybe a new activity that will bring in another generation.
 - i. Unfortunately, people of every generation can tell when churches are just trying “attract” them... you know why? Because we act like fish out of water!
 - ii. Nothing says you are insincere more than being something you are not... being phony is a big turn off.
- b. Do you know what grows a strong connection between people of all ages?
 - i. Love. Showing the love of Jesus in the most genuine way – show people that you love them in Jesus’ name.
 - ii. Jesus, the living Vine connects us, and His sacrificial love helps the connection to grow strong.
 - iii. The divide between young and old takes time to make a connection, but the Vine is able to reach both sides by the power of the Holy Spirit and make deep roots.
- c. Be with the picture of our Gospel lesson today... Simeon... Anna... Joseph... Mary... and baby Jesus.

- i. All generations coming together and focused on the most important Person... their Savior, and ours.
- ii. Jesus is the living Vine that unites us all... strengthening our bonds through His love... and providing the bridge that spans any gap.
Amen.

¹ Major Dalton, "The Generational Bridge," Contextive.org (10-3-19)