

## **Homily – What Our Church Has to Offer**

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Two weeks ago, I went through our St. Barnabas online picture directory, and I calculated the average age of the people at our parish.

We have one person who is a hundred-years old, 5 that are in their nineties, and 19 people in their eighties.

We have 53 people in their seventies and 47 people in their sixties.

Then we get down to our average age of 58, and we have 16 people in their fifties, 12 people in their forties, another 12 people in their thirties and 9 people in their twenties.

Finally, we have 9 youth and 16 kids.

Again, our average age is 58. We have about 20 from the silent generation, 100 baby boomers, 30 gen-x, 20 millennials, and about 10 from this latest generation called iGen or gen-z. This latest generation is again called iGen or generation z, and they are between ten and twenty-two years old.

As you would expect, this latest generation has many of the same characteristics of other generations who have gone through their teens and early twenties. They are making their way through high school and for some through college. They are going through the initial discovery of talents and gifts and are discerning a livelihood. They are still very influenced by parents and guardians.

But this latest generation also has things that are unique since they have been shaped by devices, social media, 9-11, school shootings, the Great Recession of 2008, marriage equality and the first black president. And it is hard to believe that these younger minds have not also been shaped by our current political environment. To this end, I've been reading a book by Jean Twenge called iGen – Why Today's Super-Connected Kids Are

## Growing Up Less Rebellious, More Tolerant, Less Happy – And Completely Unprepared for Adulthood.

Of course that last part makes me sigh with fatigue, but the fact that iGen'ers are less happy makes me sad. The book I read attributes this lower level of happiness to several things including a need for safety and a sense of physical isolation from others.

I've always thought that our grandparents were over reacting to the internet stuff. My grandparents didn't get a radio in the car until the 1980s because they thought it was a distraction. However, there is a lot of data and research that shows that the more time one spends on the internet, or social media, or texting the lower one's happiness. Interestingly, computer games, video chat and working are neutral for happiness, and in-person social interaction, print media, religious services, and sport or exercise increase happiness.

I was delighted to read that religious services are the second highest inhibitor of unhappiness, but I'm not surprised. We all know the high that we get in our day when we worship God together. Whether one is an introvert or an extrovert, community worship is a way for us to better connect to God, others and self. And, no matter the mood with which one comes to community worship on a low or on a high, we all benefit from sharing God's love with one another. And, good sermon and good music don't hurt either. And, the sharing of the bread and the wine reconnect back to Christ in a way that is beyond understanding. Yes, I think we all know the beauty of community worship.

How many of you were able to watch some of yesterday's funeral service for John McCain at the National Cathedral? There is something glorious about the gathering together of a community to commend a person's life to God. I was asked yesterday at People's Kitchen if the National Cathedral was interfaith, but it is not. Just like us, here at St. Barnabas, the National Cathedral is part of the Episcopal branch of the Jesus movement.

Now, this morning's Scripture readings show us some of the ways that the Episcopal branch of the Jesus movement can be of help to this latest generation of youth and young adults.

At the beginning of the reading from the letter of James, we heard, *"Every generous act of giving, with every perfect gift, is from above, coming down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation or shadow due to change"*

In the Episcopal branch of the Jesus movement we believe in the unchanging love of God, a love that never varies or wains. God is always present with us, and always loving us. There is nothing we can do to increase God's love for us or to decrease God's love for us. And, we may make God sad with our lives, but we do not change God's unbounded grace for each and every one of use.

iGen'ers have been taught to value safety more than any generation before them, and a safe and secure environment is not just comforting but expected. They want to know that they will feel safe and protected – not just physically but socially and emotionally. With the Great Recession, many iGen'ers grew up in families facing financial insecurity and joblessness. The ongoing wars in the Middle East and well publicized school shootings have left iGen'ers with a sense of unease about the safety of the world. The growing income bifurcation is leaving iGen'ers with the fear that if they every make a misstep in school or career that behind from an economic standpoint they will be left.

Unlike some other branches, the Episcopal branch of the Jesus movement brings a sense of safety and security to iGen'ers since we believe in a God that never stops loving us. We don't have an angry God; we have a loving God. We don't have a vengeful God; we have a God of grace. We don't have a God who plays favorites; we have a God who loves all equally. We have a God who never changes, and this can be of comfort to iGen'ers and to the rest of us as well.

Now, in this morning's Gospel reading we hear Jesus admonish the Pharisees to let go of following the rules for the rule sake. In quoting from the prophet Isaiah, *"Jesus said to them, 'Isaiah prophesied rightly about you hypocrites, as it is written, 'This people honors me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me; in vain do they worship me, teaching human precepts as doctrines.' You abandon the commandment of God and hold to human tradition."*

Throughout history we have all too often taken the words and teachings of God and used them to our own ends. God has become a puppet for our own needs for power and control. Throughout history, and even still today, we use the Word of God to subjugate women, support racism, justify homophobia, and explain away any responsibility we might have with the growing economic divide in our American society.

More than their predecessors the iGen'ers, this latest generation, have even more of a sense of these wrongs that have been done throughout history, and they have a sense of tolerance for people who may be different. iGen'ers grow up with people who are of other ethnicities and spiritual traditions. iGen'ers have female teachers, and parents and role models who show that subjugation of women is abnormal and not to be accepted. And, while some in the older generations continue to justify only one norm for gender expression and sexual orientation, Millennials and iGen'ers expect to see a wide diversity of expression. The Episcopal branch of the Jesus movement is a good place for iGen'ers to join together with others who are of like mind. Social justice issues are a core part of our identity and ministry here at St. Barnabas.

And, this brings us back to the letter of James that we heard read earlier. *"But be doers of the word, and not merely hearers who deceive themselves. For if any are hearers of the word and not doers, they are like those who look at themselves in a mirror; for they look at themselves and, ongoing away, immediately forget what they were like. But those who look into the perfect law, the law of liberty, and persevere, being not hearers who forget but doers who act-they will be blessed in their doing."*

As we take love into our hearts and minds, we should respond with action. The love of Jesus is not only to be believed, but it is to be experienced, and tasted, and internalized, and given back to others. This is something that is very relevant to the needs and wants of the iGen'ers. The stereotypical iGen'er has a shorter attention span and video has become a more important method of a teaching. In addition, learning by doing and by seeing outcomes has become more highly valued. By extension, service of others has becomes even more important for these latest two generations.

And, I am happy to say that I think there are many branches of the Jesus movement that recognize and embrace service of others that is so valued by iGener's and Millennials. We may not always do it as much as we should, but most Christians will acknowledge how important it is to take care of others. Maybe the iGen'ers will join together with the Millennials to make service and action a great part of all of our spiritual journeys. Wouldn't that be grand.

We want the Jesus movement to be centered on community worship of God.

We want the Jesus movement to show people how they can use the Bible to lead a better, healthier life.

We want the Jesus movement to help us pray as individuals and as a group.

We want the Jesus movement to be centered on love, and not on the baggage that so often replaces love.

We want the Jesus movement to help us see beauty in the other and to not be afraid of diversity.

We want the Jesus movement to convict us to action, so that we can be the hands and feet and voice of Jesus.

And, we want a Jesus movement that is full of iGen'ers. To that end, we need to show how our branch is relevant to the lived lives and unique needs of the iGen'ers as well as all the generations who have come before.

As it has done throughout the centuries, I am convinced that the Holy Spirit will continue to guide the Jesus movement into the future. I wonder what it will look like?