

## **To the Next Generation – June 26, 2012**

**2 Kings 2:1-2, 6-14**

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Eleven years ago today I was ordained to the ministry of Word and Sacrament. It was an amazing day – the culmination of years of wrestling with my call to ministry, but it was also an affirmation. An affirmation of what I knew in my heart and my mind to be true – despite the challenges I had faced along the way, especially that of being a woman in a conservative Baptist denomination. The ordination day itself was quite surreal as I both thought about and saw those special people who had led me or walked beside me or pushed me along the path to get to this day. To use the cliché – my life passed before my eyes as hundreds of memories came to mind.

Most, if not all of us, have been fortunate to have at least one mentor in our lives. And as you look back and think about those people, you may find that your memories are also paired with emotions. Feelings of anger or resentment as they pushed you to work harder than you ever had before, feelings of gratitude for their unending support of your efforts, feelings of love for the bonds you built with them, feelings of accomplishment as they smiled with pride at your successes.

Additionally, many of us have had the honor of being a mentor to someone in our lives; whether it was with your own children or grandchildren, or a student you taught or coached, or young coworker or intern or apprentice, you've had the joy of seeing someone grow out of their awkwardness or the pain of watching them fail, without being able to shield them from the fall.

Today's lesson from 2 Kings is about a mentor/mentee relationship, and it is the last of our stories about Elijah. In the case of this relationship, Elijah has been a rather standoffish mentor. When called told him to anoint Elisha to take his place as prophet, Elijah was indifferent to Elisha's eagerness to follow him. When he knows his time is over, he keeps instructing Elisha to stay back. When Elisha asks for a double portion of his spirit, Elijah is noncommittal. He comes off as a bit crusty; but considering the struggles he has had during his tenure as a prophet, especially with Ahab and Jezebel, he is allowed to be crusty.

This story of passing the mantle, or in other words, the authority, onto the next generation is as important for us as it has been for all generations who have come before us. There comes a time, there will always come a time, when we all finally have to let go, and turn things over to the younger generations.

A few days ago, the United Kingdom held a referendum to determine its status within the European Union. Many people were surprised by the results of the vote, when a majority of the citizens of Great Britain actually voted to leave the EU. Nicknamed the Brexit – short for Britain’s Exit – the immediate responses to the vote were quite telling.

In a breakdown of the voter demographics, the older the voter, the more likely he or she voted to leave the EU. A great majority of the younger voters voted to remain as part of the European Union. In the aftermath, several news sources reported that some younger voters were angry with the older voters for “ruining their futures.” They wanted to stay, as shown by their voting, and were frustrated by the older voters. They believed that it was in their best interest to be a part of the greater whole of the European Union, rather than striking out on their own.

Other voters were shocked that their vote to leave would really make a difference, they really had no idea that the vote would turn out this way, and some wanted to know if they could change their votes to stay. It will be interesting to see how this situation unfolds in the weeks and months to come.

This past week I went to the Washington Island Forum, along with a few other members from our church. The conference was on the topic of the future of the church with a focus on some specific examples of how the church is already changing and what things we might do as existing churches or new church developments to reach out to people in younger generations.

We had a great deal of discussion around the differences in the various generations that currently exist and what is important for those generations. It was a fascinating event. It was led by Carol Howard-Merritt, a Presbyterian pastor and writer, who has been very engaged in the movement of new emerging congregations. In fact, her husband is leading one of these very different churches down in Tennessee, called the Justice and Peace Center.

One of the main ideas that came from the event is that things are changing. No doubt about it. The younger generations see the world around them in ways that are quite different than older generations. Now these are generalizations, and there are certainly exceptions. But their world views are different. What they find important is different. What they believe and value is different. And there comes a time when the mantle needs to be passed on to the young leaders who have their own unique perspectives. The mentors need to move out of the way of the mentees, allowing them to take the lead.

This doesn't mean that everything we are doing as the church right now is wrong. Quite the contrary. We are doing some amazing things here at First Presbyterian. We don't need to stop doing those things. But what we might consider is looking at a fresh approach to how we do our ministries. We might look at some of the new ideas that the younger folks are bringing forward. We might expand our perspectives a bit and discern where God's Spirit is leading us.

Some folks around the country think that the Church is dying. The church isn't dying. It is changing. The Spirit is still moving, still empowering people, still creating, still making disciples, and calling leaders. I think if we take a close look around us, we will see where God's Spirit is leading us. It may be a little different, but instead of fearing change, let's step out in faith and see where the Spirit takes us.