



Youth: The Church's Present

“Don’t let anyone look down on you because you are young” (I Timothy 4:12).

Having turned 40 earlier this year, I am well beyond the age at which I can any longer find solace or encouragement for myself in the words quoted above. If someone looks down on me now, it is probably because I have done something genuinely foolish.

Young people are an important part of the Church’s life and ministry. When their presence or service is missing, the body suffers no less than in the absence of those more seasoned.

We sometimes mistakenly say, “The young people are the church’s future.” I have been guilty of saying this, too. I pray that we still have the young people around in the future. But I know that they are here now. The youth are the Church’s present. Like the rest of us, they need to be growing in grace and serving in grace today.

Are we sometimes tempted to overlook their gifts because they are in grade school, high school, or college? Is that biblical? The author of Ecclesiastes reminds us, “Better a poor but wise youth than an old but foolish king who no longer knows how to take warning” (4:13).

Look at the way wise young people have served the Lord in the Scriptures. How old was David when he was the only man in Israel with enough faith in God’s promises to go out and face the giant Goliath? Maybe 16? What does David say to Goliath as he marches out to meet him? “You come against me with sword and spear and javelin, but I come against you in the name of the Lord Almighty, the God of the armies of Israel, whom you have defied. This day the Lord will hand you over to me, and I’ll strike you down and cut off your head....All those gathered here will know that it is not by sword or spear that the Lord saves; for the battle is the Lord’s, and he will give all of you into our hands” (1 Samuel 17:45-47). Did David lack the maturity to serve just because he was a teenager? Decidedly not.

How old were Daniel, Hananiah (Shadrach), Mishael (Meshach), and Azariah (Abednego) when Nebuchadnezzar took them into his service? They were almost certainly still in their early teens (70 years pass between Daniel 1:1 and Daniel 10:1). This pagan king recognized talent and utilized it when he saw it. And did these young men lack the spiritual maturity to make tough decisions or give a clear witness? They answered the king of the world’s threat to kill them for refusing to commit idolatry: “If we are thrown into the blazing furnace, the God we serve is able to save us from it, and



he will rescue us from your hand, O king. But even if he does not, we want you to know, O king, that we will not serve your gods or worship the image of gold you have set up” (Daniel 3:17-18).

How old was Mary, the mother of Jesus, when God called her to bear the Savior of the World? 13? 15? Look up Luke 1:46-55 and read again Mary’s poetic response to her cousin Elizabeth’s greeting. These theological gems come from the mouth of a girl who would still be in junior high school today. She was well qualified for the task to which she was called: Bearing, raising, and teaching God’s own Son, the Savior of the World. Jesus may have been a 1st Grader before Mary was even out of her teens.

I am not proposing that we elect teenagers to our church council (though God has given some teens greater responsibility than our synod president!). But can we neglect to train and incorporate them into the regular life and mission of our congregation? I don’t know how much the youths listed above would have been interested in a trip to Six Flags or an all night lock-in, not that there is anything wrong with those things. But it is apparent that they were interested in studying God’s word, especially his saving promises. And they were not afraid to serve their Lord in a way that could mean great personal sacrifice—even death!

Sometimes old people say, “Energy is wasted on the youth.” Maybe that’s because we haven’t channeled it in God’s direction. The Lord will forgive us for our poor stewardship of our children’s gifts. May he also open our eyes to better see their place in the Body of Christ.

In Christ, Pastor Vieths