

## “Generation to Generation: Millennials” Drew Hogan, January 2023

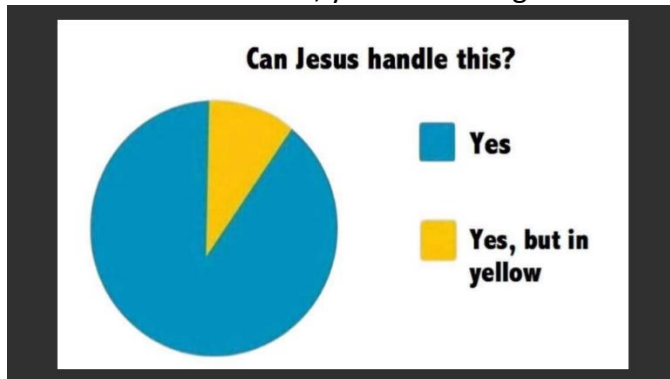
Grace and Peace in the name of God our creator, and in the name of that millennial of a different millennia, who wandered from his parents as a child, learned the stories of past generations, and poured into the next generations. That one who led a young adult grassroots movement that gathered around meals, and wore sandals when he healed the sick, that one whom we call, Jesus, The Christ.

Friends, if there is one thing I want you to know about my generation - actually I want you to know lots of things about my generation – BUT for starters, it is that Millennials are the inventors, instigators, and curators of memes and meme culture.

Now in case the word meme is new to you, or it's still a little ambiguous: At it's most refined form: Memes are the spreading of culture and ideas, and style through online formats. And at it's most basic form: it's a funny photo, with a caption, that we share on social media.

It is a rabbit hole on the internet – and maybe you’re familiar with these corners of the internet – but I want to share that if you looked at my phone, at the saved memes, you could very easily identify that I am a pastoral intern, pursuing my Masters of Divinity at Claremont School of Theology, and that I also serve Full Time as the director of Children, youth, and family ministries at Portland First United Methodist Church.

IF YOU SAW MY PHONE, you'd see things like this:



Or This:



Or... This.... And to confirm, it is 6 months and 15 days away.



I'm honored to be here this morning as we continue the series: Generation to Generation. The purpose of this series is to understand ourselves and the people we're in community with - in our own lives and as a church. AND - in particular - asking and wrestling with the question of what the identity of this church is and what faithful ministry looks like through a generational lens.

So far we've heard from: Gwen two weeks ago, representing the Gen-Z, Heather continues to share about her experience as a Gen-X, and I know there have been good conversations about your generations and your experiences in the conversations that happen later in the day.

Today, I represent my generation: Gen-Y, better known as The Millennials. But I know we acknowledge, I'm just one person, with a unique story. I don't represent all millennials, but I recognize much of what formed my life and the places I show up today are similar to many Millennials.

I was born in rural SW Illinois among the corn and soy fields – but generationally, I feel like I have to be a bit more specific... some of us may know people born in the middle of a corn field. We had a hospital in the town over, I was born at the hospital.

Heather has echoed Hayden Shaw, the author of the book we're paralleling this series on. They both defined Millennials as "wanted" and while I believe I was “wanted” growing up; my mom assures me that they “wanted” me; the 2nd kid... I was just a bit of a surprise in the timing.

I'm the son of baby boomers. My mother is an offensive 2nd Wave feminist who shows love and compassion beyond her capacity. And my father died from cancer when I was three, and so my mother raised me with the support of my grandparents in Dallas, Texas. This meant, generationally I got to have a front row seat to my mom's online dating in the early days and boy there are some stories – BUT... there's not time for this at this moment, so you'll just have to join the conversation at Tabor Heights at 12:30 in the Fireside Room or later tonight on Zoom at 5:30.

This meant I grew up close to my Traditionalist grandparents and they showed me they were religious but not necessarily spiritual.

In Dallas I grew up with a diverse reality with migrants and refugees from across the globe - Asia, Africa, Central and South America. This diverse cultural and inter-religious reality was a gift that the adults around me did not have - and that has led to some significant differences in my experiential reality from many of the older generations around me that grew up in towns with 3 churches, 2 stop-signs, and 1 race.

I grew up with computer time as part of my kindergarten class and like many of my friends in public school, I knew in kindergarten that college was an expectation.

In 4th grade: I had an online community with *AOL instant messenger*

In 5th grade: my own computer

6th grade: myspace

7th grade: my first cellphone

And 8th grade: Facebook

You'd think I was a social butterfly, but I was an introvert - it was the norm to always be connected through technology.

For many Millennials, I'm an anomaly for my generation: I got married at 22 - but I'm on course with many: that having my own kids is not a huge priority. And although my spouse grew up on Long Island, after we met in New York City, we moved to the West Coast to be close to her family; including her grandmother who is 101 who enjoys writing and sharing the stories of her life growing up.

Even though I know church ministry is no glamorously paying job, housing is absurd. My sister-in-law and her husband both work for Google and they can't afford a house in their area! For many millennials this is a HUGE source of stress along with all the other economic systems that we see going wrong and going in the favor of older wealthier people.

For me, specifically around housing, Intergenerational living makes sense in this season of life. There is mutual benefit for my aging in-laws and for us, the additional social support and not bleeding money on housing - so for the moment, we're living with my wife's parents. BUT, you better believe the topic of co-dependency is on the tip of our tongue and we're very intentional about conversations, open dialogue, and our mutual independence.

Overall, Millennials were told society would be good and we'd be able to access the success of our Baby Boomer parents and the adults that surround us, and that we'd have a seat at the table - but instead we find ourselves with heaps of educational debt, low paying jobs, life-shortening work hours, disproportionately expensive housing, and a frustration at not being talked with.

In work, that means prioritizing our mental health and self-compassion which means we value ourselves higher than what some of our parents did growing up and that can translate to switching jobs more frequently.

In churches, that means when Millennials don't have spots at the tables that really matter, we feel undervalued and invisible, and since we grew up with unlimited options, leaving toxic or harmful places can be pretty easy.

I think much of this contributes to a mental hurdle - and in some cases some significant mental health issues rooted in:

Discouragement for not being able to reach the goals we were told we could reach,  
Trying to deprogram perfectionism - in ability, performance, or physical appearance ... and how that rarely lines up with the perception of our parent's dreams for us.  
and the misalignment of social skills that can be quite off-putting - like if you've ever tried calling a millennial and they picked up, consider yourself lucky because picking up the phone can be one of the most terrifying things for many Millennials.

This all adds up to the discouragement that many millennials feel.

I understand discouragement, and I think we all do, but I wonder, looking at our text, for Micah and the Israelites, how did they experience discouragement and still move through that? Did they have the older generation just saying, "pull yourself up by your sandal straps!"

Our prophet Micah was from the people - he was part of the community - he wasn't an outsider. He challenged and encouraged the people - even though it can be difficult to hear those things together.

I am grateful for the prophets that spoke into my life- even when it made me so frustrated or felt far from my truth. I'm grateful to have prophetic voices like Gwen's to challenge and admonish us, even when it leaves us needing to toil with ourselves.

In this passage, we get the bumper sticker phrase: "Do justice. Love kindness. Walk humbly with your God." And please, carry that with you. In fact, get a shirt that says it and wear that when you go to a protest that holds up signs with Tyre Nichols name and both claims his belovedness as a child of God and our world's need for justice.

But today, we're gonna focus on the first half:

We're taking God to Court

HEY God, what's the deal?

God's reply is 'State your case! What have I done to you? How have I made you tired?'

REMEMBER: I brought you out of Egypt.

REMEMBER: those ancestors of yours: Moses, Aaron, Miriam.

REMEMBER: the people that weren't even Israelites: Balaam and his donkey spoke up to the ruler that wouldn't allow the Israelites to settle.

*Just to reframe that: when the Israelites were having housing issues... when the rent was too steep... Justice showed up through the person the Israelites called an "enemy" – and – it was creation, an animal, Balaam's donkey that spoke words and inspired Balaam into action.*

God says - REMEMBER: Crossing the Jordan River into the promise land: from Shittim to Gilgal. And when we hear that we go back in time and remember that journey. We remember that wandering in the desert was also a time of change in the Israelite community: they had to unlearn some bad habits... maybe they had to make room at the table for the generations that came after them.

That's terrifying and that's ok.

I'm sure Moses was sad that the Promise land was removed from his itinerary. But, whether it's because we stumbled into the Desert, or we followed a guy with 2 stone tablets, or we were born in the desert (maybe there's a hospital in the town over); sometimes the Desert is right where we are supposed to be and God meets us there.

Those are the things God reminds us of: our ancestors, their journey's, and the places God is showing up. God is reminding us about our generational ties, and it's here that we can realign to the core of our calling and identity: do justice, love kindness, walk humbly with God.

You know, at our core each of us are terrifyingly similar to the generations before. The struggle is we express it differently - and we know different can be scary.

I remember growing up in Dallas - over the summer, I'd go over to my grandparent's house for a sleep over. Seafoam green walls, stale air filled with the soothing voices of the antiques road show, and all you could eat shredded wheat. Every day my grandpa would take the Dallas Morning News - and who knew if he read any of it – but you could see in the comics section a missing rectangle where he had harvested the Peanuts. Perhaps like I harvest my memes. He'd have one ready to show you when you came into the house and he used a filing cabinet to store every single peanuts comic he'd come across - I use my phone.

Or consider this: my entry to serving in church was teaching the 5-year-old Sunday School class when I first got to college, which was something I saw my grandpa do. He didn't hound me to do it, but when the Spirit showed up, I saw that gift he gave me.

Intergenerationally, when I was in high school, church was SUCH an impact because I had people of all age groups help me know that I mattered in that space, AND that I was beloved. And so, for me, today, that's what I consider when I'm working with Students, and I ask myself: "am I helping them know that they are beloved?" ... I sure know they help me remember I am beloved.

When we're reminded about our generational ties - *before us and after us* - we can rediscover the core of our calling and identity.

I think whether it's Micah who reminded the community that they were loved by a faithful God or Jesus who reminded the people who were outcast that they were beloved, we're talking about seeing and naming one another's belovedness.

So here's what it looks like:

Naming our belovedness - is literally saying "You are BE-LOVED." You don't have to be BE PERFECT to BE LOVED; you are beloved. The rigid and clean dreams we had for ourselves, or the dreams our parents had for us, looked attainable on paper, but life has been more challenging than that.

Naming our belovedness, means seeing our Gifts and learning with us, and from us. I'd love to say, as a millennial I've been asked how I experience God as many times as I've been asked how to share photos between two devices.

Naming our belovedness is making that attempt to learn pronouns and names and to celebrate people who are liberated or liberating their identity. Your effort to learn our names and pronouns and initiating a "hello" or "welcome" lets us know we're seen.

Naming our belovedness, means affirming our truth about God. I believe many of my friends left the church - not because they don't believe in God, but because the God they EXPERIENCED through the spirit was more vibrant than the God they were being told to KNOW in church, and let's be honest, brunch with a squad of your besties at one of the amazing restaurants on Stark or Glisan is also where Jesus shows up.

Naming our belovedness, means making space at the table. You know this, but millennials also want to do justice, love kindness, and walk humbly with God - so let's do it WITH each other! Millennials are competent, collaborative, and understanding. Even if we're ready to revolutionize systems, we value community over individualism, so we're here with you if you can acknowledge our ideas.

And in the church, this may mean disrupting your current rhythms and allowing ways for others to be involved, because beloved people who are connected across generations and united by God make it out of slavery, through the desert, past housing woes, and into the promise land.

So may we make space at the brunch tables, communion tables, and legislative tables, for one another; for the people Jesus sees, so we can listen to one another and to listen to the prophets. Those who will help us remember our generational ties, God's faithfulness, and encourage us as we name for one another: YOU ARE BELOVED.

Amen.