

BETWEEN 30 AND 70

[ROLY] Since Andrew came in November we've been playing around with the idea of speaking together on a theme. And this is our opportunity! It would have been nice if I'd been born in 1948 and Andrew in 1988 (which he was), or I'd be born in 1949 (which I was) and Andrew in 1989. There are just over 39 years between us, 39 years 65 days to be precise, but we've rounded it to 40!

And 40 comes up quite frequently in the Bible, 40 days, 40 days and nights, 40 years in the wilderness; and 40 years can be seen as a biblical generation. You may remember, you may not.... that in mid-2008 we worked our way through a series of 4 messages on the generations.

Our key text then was:

Psalm 71:17-18

Since my youth, God, you have taught me,
and to this day I declare your marvellous deeds.

¹⁸ Even when I am old and grey,

do not forsake me, my God,

till I declare your power to the next generation,

your mighty acts to all who are to come.

The Christian church is always only two generations away from extinction – if the timeless message of Jesus isn't passed on from generation to generation.

To use current sociological understanding we have several generations present today – I've identified 6. Various names are used but generally it looks something like this, the dates are always approximate:

The Lost Generation: those who reached young adulthood during and after World War I

The Greatest Generation: around 1921-27

The Builder Generation: born 1927-1945

Baby Boomers: born 1946-64 (between 55 and 73 this year)

Generation X: 1965-1978 (between 41 and 54 this year)

Generation Y: 1979-early 1990s (late 20s to 40 this year)

Millennials: young adults since (18-29)

Next generation: Listener article.

The slide shows you that Andrew and I are three generations apart.

How does this work out in practice?

I've identified 6 things that shaped my life and Andrew's done the same:

[ROLY] Monoculturalism. I lived in a small South Canterbury community. A girl got engaged to a man from another ethnicity, and he was divorced. It created some waves.

[ANDY] Multiculturalism.

I was born in Christchurch and more or less immediately moved to Sweden.

My family spent a few years living there and travelling around the world. I think this speaks to how much more accessible it is for us to fly abroad and experience different peoples and cultures. If you think about it, it's a little crazy that we can jump on an airplane for a thousand dollars, spend a day hurtling through the sky at 900 km/hr and then arrive on the other side of the world in a place like the UK.

By age 13 I had lived in South Auckland and where many of my friends were from the Pacific islands. When I got a little older we moved to ethnically diverse area of Christchurch. My two closest friends from that time are Kiwi-Malaysian and Taiwanese, and we still meet up every year, 17 years later. We went through High School together and there was a lot of cross cultural experience there, a lot of shared community.

Today, where I live in Auckland, if you wander into town you're struck with a real pot of different cultures. That's the normal state of things. And that's pretty special. Take for example my Church in Auckland.

We share a building with a Russian church who hold services after us, but every now and again we have combined services. When we do it it's something very special. It is a powerful thing when you hear the worship songs you know and love being sung in different languages at the same time. It brings your heart to this place of joy. It really drives home that though we are different in many ways, together we are part of the same body under Christ. Together, we are God's children.

[ROLY] The World. The Cold War, Hydrogen bomb, and Cuban crisis.

[ANDY] The World.

... a lot of what you've just talked about has always seemed pretty distant to me. Like something remote, from the history books. Perhaps that is a sad thing. For my generation, we had the War on Terror.

I was 13 years old and at school when my class watched the planes fly into the twin towers on a little CRT television.

We all went silent. Even the class jokers kept quiet. I don't think any of us fully grasped the full reality of it.

In the years that followed we've watched American culture shift from the borders. We grew up almost solely on American media; they're TV shows and cartoons. Our news always kept tabs on what was happening over there.

Over the years that culture has shifted; the fun upbeat images of the "Fresh Prince of Bellaire" don't really seem to fit anymore. The rest of the world looks different too. From little old New Zealand, it seems like we're sheltered from a lot of it. But the truth is we've changed a bit too. The world is a lot smaller than it used to be.

[ROLY] Christianity the dominant religion (who listens to Christians).

We had the peak of the Sunday school movement – kids in every class who went to church.

[ANDY] Christianity the dominant religion.

I've heard it said quite a lot recently that we live in a post-Christian society.

Many of the people I know who are my age, came from Christian families, but walked away from God as they grew older. Christianity was this thing that wasn't perceived as being very popular. It was constantly ridiculed in the media, and in the cartoons we watched, like the Simpsons. In High School, my English teachers ridiculed Christianity as foolish, and out of date. All of this shaped the sort of environment that I grew up in outside of my family and the Church. I think as a teenager at High School you're much more likely to be on the receiving end of the *unfiltered wrath of hormonally charged opinion* if you stick out. So as a young man I learned not to talk about Jesus with my friends or with others who weren't Christian, because I didn't want to "trigger", or offend anyone.

The thing is that God calls us to be countercultural. We aren't always going to fit in. Thankfully as I grew older I opened up a lot more. Our lives *with God is* who we are. It defines us. So talking about Him should come out of us naturally, and not be stifled. Though wisdom says there is always a time and place!

[ROLY] How we were taught at Church.

Jesus was for Sunday School; the 10 commandments and the New Testament letters were for Church – that led to the code of don'ts or as Bob Mumford put it so brilliantly, 'all I knew was, get saved, be filled with the Holy spirit; don't smoke; don't chew gum, don't drink; don't run with those who do, stay holy, keep clean and wait for the Rapture.' We were shaped by a code of don'ts.

[ANDY] How we were taught at Church.

I was a very frustrated and rebellious young teenager. I didn't like Sunday school. I didn't like youth group. I hated being a follower. Church was fine, but I wish it didn't have to be first thing in the morning! I always went along with the family though, as messed up as I thought my parents were in my teenage wisdom, I still followed along with them; I loved God and reading the Bible. There's a funny thing about reading the Bible though, we call it the living Word of God for a reason - it works on you. I had this real hunger for wisdom and understanding that I found there. And while some of my Christian journey began with a code of don't do this, don't do that, we were taught to see through it. I found that what really was at the heart of it all, was a personal relationship with the *living God*. I found myself convicted when I neglected that relationship. The same way you might miss someone dear to you when you neglect your relationship with them. I'd play video games until some crazy hour in the morning, but I'd always make time before bed to read the Bible and pray. Eventually I started going to churches that were more my style and journeying with others in their walks of faith too; it turns out that they had always been teaching the same thing, that it's all about our love for God and one another.

[ROLY] Evangelists.

Professional evangelists did evangelism; we had three Union evangelists and Billy Graham was here in 1959 and

1969. The lesser thing that shaped my life was that as soon as church was over the men would all light their cigarettes on the pavement outside church – you don't know what you don't know.

[ANDY] Evangelists.

I didn't really understand what that meant. In Christchurch we had this guy who would stand on a box in the square and yell at people about the Bible, but it didn't really seem to have a good effect.

I remember hearing crazy stories about this guy called Billy Graham, and every now and again there'd be a huge Christian event where someone would fill a stadium, talk for a bit about God and then have an altar call. But I wasn't really into all that. I took a real shine to Derek Prince though, he just seemed a lot more sensible. He talked about the Bible more and about things that other people didn't seem to want to talk about. I respected that.

I think in that quieter vein, evangelism in my teenage years was done more on a small group basis. It was conversational, personal, and relational.

[ROLY] Computers.

One more thing, Thomas Watson, the President of IBM said in 1943, 'I think there is a world market for maybe five computers.' If there's one thing that marks the difference between Andrew's growing years and mine it would be computers, the internet, Wikipedia and smart phones.

[ANDY] Computers.

I was a part of the first generation to really get into the internet as it picked up.

I still remember when Google was new, and I'd tell all my friends that it was better than all the other search engines out there. With the internet came freedom of knowledge, if you wanted to know something you found it online, and socialisation went online. It also gave exposure to the darker side of humanity. And that's the world that we continue to live in today. That's the world that our youth are being raised in.

[ANDY] Core message.

I am only 30 years of age. But I notice that past the age of 20 the years seem to slip by faster and faster.

Now I'm starting to grow a bit of grey hair, my metabolism is slowing down a little, and it isn't as easy to bounce back from late nights as it once was. A couple of my close friends in their 20s have taken to calling me "Old man"; so if I'm an old man Roly, what does that make you! Maybe it reverses a bit in spirit when you hit retirement - I've heard for example, a lot of stories about you playing golf lately.

I did a little research into all this and found that in a recent American survey, they discovered that by-and-large, the older you get, the younger you feel. The same survey found that most people thought the strongest mark of old age is frequently forgetting familiar names. This makes me a bit nervous from my time here at Caversham Baptist Church.

Which brings us to our text for today, a Psalm written by King David in his older years. Psalm 71, verses 17 to 18.

Where we read:

Psalm 71:17-18:

¹⁷ You have taught me ever since I was young,
and I still tell of your wonderful acts.

¹⁸ Now that I am old and my hair is gray,
do not abandon me, O God!

Be with me while I proclaim your power and might
to all generations to come.

In the psalm we find that David is no longer the young man who had stood before Goliath.

He was instead, a grandfather. His kingdom was established.

He ruled Israel from Jerusalem and as king took whatever his eyes desired.

And this is exactly what happened. As king he abused the authority that God had given him, and arranged for the murder of a faithful man so that he could marry his widow, Bathsheba.

Now, not so long after, we find him old and grey, and in trouble.

He had been respected, and his home had been secure. But now he was being driven out of that security by his own son, Absalom. All that he had grown used to was suddenly turned on its head in an instant. And now in the later years of his life David finds himself facing the kind of insecurity and trouble that he often faced in his youth.

I wonder if it would have made him feel young again; - or perhaps, very old.

As David's going through all this, as his kingdom is stripped from him and he flees from Jerusalem on the run for his life, he remembers the God of his youth. He remembers that God has always been the same.

In Psalm 71 King David calls on the same living God that has blessed, saved, and been a steadfast anchor for him since the days of his youth. It's a declaration of his continued trust in God.

In the Old Testament one of God's most revealing titles for Himself is, I am "the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob."

He is the God of many generations. Many have known Him, but throughout the generations he remains the same.

While David's world, while his circumstances might change, he knows that God remains who He has always been, the *single* saviour of humanity, who desires for us to know, love and enjoy Him, in fullness.

Now David also does something else here that we see repeated a few times in the book of Psalms - he declares that he'll share his experiences of God with others. Not just to the young, but to all generations.

No matter what he's going through, he commits himself to praising God and talking about his experiences of God with others. He says, "I will proclaim your power and might to all generations to come."

And this serves two purposes.

First it encourages himself. In the darkest circumstances and in the brightest, when he speaks to others about his life experience with God he is reminding, and encouraging himself of God's unchanging nature, mercy, and faithfulness. It's an act of bringing himself closer to God. And second, he encourages others.

Imagine if you will, that you have a bag of diamonds. Precious, expensive, and all yours.

Imagine that as you walk your life's journey, that whenever you meet someone on the road, that you take a handful of diamonds, and place it in their hands.

This is what it is like when we praise God to others. This is what it's like when we tell others about what God has done for us. It builds up, shapes, and encourages the lives of everyone around us.

In 1 Peter 2 verse 9, we read that this is not just something that David did. David was onto something.

The Word of God, talks about us, his people, it tells us that:

⁹...you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's special possession,
chosen to proclaim the wonderful acts of God, who called you out of darkness into his own marvellous light.

So think on this, together. As families, friends, neighbours, brothers and sisters in Christ, from different cultures and generations and mind-sets, whatever your difference and background; wherever you may be in life – in all circumstances, in the good and the bad, remember to share your praise, your uplifting stories and experiences of God with each other, and with the world. Done faithfully, it is for everyone's benefit.

[ROLY] The last thing we want to do is, say in the light of the shaping us is how this has influenced our understanding of God our Father, Jesus the Son and the Holy Spirit.

[ROLY] God the Father.

My image of God was a severe man – old, with a long white beard and a stick. Serious, angry maybe - I think this may have come from Sunday school and my grandmother. It's all about keeping the rules after all. Dad helped me change that a bit but when he died very young where could I look – think I spent the next decades looking for a father figure?

Today God is mystery. On the one hand I see God as Father who delights in seeing his children emerge from the shadows and become all he planned for them to be; on the other hand God is utterly distinct from his Creation, he is altogether glorious, not able to be truly gasped by our puny minds, God is awesome and not just in this place.... It's really things like astrophysics and nanotechnology – the incredibly large and incredibly small that has given me a much deeper sense of what Genesis says when we read, 'in the beginning God' and when Revelation says: 'Then the angel showed me the river of the water of life, as clear as crystal, flowing from the throne of God and of the Lamb down the middle of the great street of the city. On each side of the river stood the tree of life, bearing twelve crops of fruit, yielding its fruit every month. And the leaves of the tree are for the healing of the nations.' Before the beginning and after the end, God is!

[ANDY] God the Father.

Funny thing, I only ever visualised God as a being of light with the outline of a human. Seated on a throne. I saw him like a father, He was very personal. Like a father He loved us greatly, but like a father He could also discipline us when we needed it. I think this developed a healthy “fear of the Lord”.

[ROLY] Jesus the Son.

I grew up being a little confused. I heard many adults speak of ‘Christ.’ Some adults used it in church and lots used it in their conversation outside church. I heard a lot about Jesus at Sunday school but not much in church – nice stories in Sunday school. But I noticed adults continually emphasised Christ. It sounded impersonal to me – as if they didn’t really know him, as if Christ was a being of some sort rather than a person.

When I went to university it was kind of the same, it was very serious stuff, it seemed as I’ve already said to be more about keeping rules than knowing someone. And as I’ve said to you before, when I got to Baptist College I found Jesus; Jesus not just in Sunday school terms but Jesus the man, who lived with real men (who probably stank of fish) and he uplifted women to their God-given place. He was strong and gentle, gracious and challenging. Jesus suffered terrible indignities and yet exhibited love beyond measure; Jesus who walked with us along the road. I remember the time when all this became a bit clearer - it was in my first year, as Andrew is, we were studying the person and work of Jesus and it occurred to me that most of my life there had been this concentrating on his work – his suffering, dying and resurrection (true and profound as this is) and not enough upon his life among people like us.

So I’ve spent lots of the last 42+ years getting really enthused about Jesus – possibly why I’ve preached lots out of the gospels – which I didn’t hear in my formation.

[ANDY] Jesus the Son.

I’m not sure he was taught as being fully human. Sometimes it felt like he was the son of God who had showed up to have a good time, lead people closer to God, and maybe mess with their heads a little! Did he go through grief and anger? Yes! He did go through tough things. He had a fully human experience.

He was intensely relational. He journeyed with people. This example could be challenging for an introvert like myself. It was comforting that he also withdrew to quiet places.

[ROLY] The Holy Spirit.

I grew up at a time when the Holy Spirit was hardly mentioned. In the early 60’s 4 men (as was the case then) graduated from Carey College, they’d all had Holy Spirit experiences, they’d been touched in a new and different way by the Holy Spirit. They got a really hard time in our churches – it was before their time in many ways. In the 60s that was danger in Baptist Churches and many churches split over the reality of the Spirit’s work and the ways in which he blesses and uses people.

I know a church which basically voted the Holy Spirit out of the worship and work of the church. As I've said before the thing the minister found the hardest was to farewell from the meeting people who'd closed their minds to what God was doing. Mind you I could at least understand them in that I'd grown up believing not in the trinity but just God and Jesus.

Then of course like so many in the early 70's I had my experiences of the Holy Spirit and continue to do so today, I came to learn the ways in which the Holy Spirit worked, the challenge to discern what was of the Holy Spirit and what was of the flesh and the importance of discerning God at work. But it was life!

So in those ways in relation to Father, Son and the Holy Spirit, my generation didn't explain everything.

[ANDY] The Holy Spirit.

We weren't taught a whole lot of specifics, but it was clear that the Spirit was still very alive and active in the world and our lives. There was a lot of exploration of that in my church youth groups. We'd have dreams, altar calls, big events, prophecies, encounters. Some gifts of the Spirit are a bit out there! But we didn't need big things to happen, because God is personal to all of us. Even when you stuff up, or aren't sure what to do, he's there with you. Sometimes it may just be a still, quiet voice, that says, "go talk to that person", or "I love you".

[ROLY] Conclusion.

[END]