

2021 Luke 1:39-45 Christ is for all

“And so I’m offering this simple phrase, from kids from 1 to 92, though it’s been said, many times, many ways, Merry Christmas to you.”

We’ve all heard the song. But I wonder what people who were 93 thought of it.

Can they not have a Merry Christmas anymore? Now I won’t nit-pick the writer of this song too much, they chose a broad spectrum of ages which includes probably 90% of the population, and I get the point they are making: Christmas is for everyone!

But our reading today does a better job of saying that. In our Gospel reading today baby Jesus, in Mary’s womb, is still probably what many in our culture would call “just a clump of cells,” but nonetheless he is real and he is there and he comes near to Elizabeth who is carrying John the baptizer in her womb, he’s probably about a little more than three months along, so just starting the second trimester.

And what happens? God works. The Holy Spirit comes to Elizabeth so that she says great truths about God, Mary, and His plan to save. And of course that little baby in her womb leaps for joy. 1 to 92 is not a broad enough category! Christmas Joy is for folks older than 92, and a whole lot younger than 1. For any of you who have had a miscarriage as my wife and I have – praise God! He works in the womb too. And so for our little ones who were prayed for and sat, albeit in the womb, in

these pews “where two or more are gathered,” where God is present – fear not, they were not missed by God at all and what a “reunion” that will be someday!

And so I’ve been thinking about age this week. Maybe because I just turned 36, and so the back is tightening up, the mind starting to go – don’t you all feel bad for me? Age is a conundrum. When you are young you can’t wait to be older, when you are older, you only wish time would slow down. A matter of perspective I suppose.

Yet still the world spins around, midlife crises go on and depression rises because we can’t focus on what matters and have forgotten the eternal promises of God. Meanwhile that same world doesn’t know what to do with age either. We know what our society does to the unborn, but even after they are born kids are devalued. We redefine marriage and sex and gender with no thought of how it is hurting our kids. We use them as pawns in court proceedings, and ship them off sometimes, I am not joking – I’ve worked in childcare, for 12 hours a day so we can go on with our lives and jobs. And we wonder, again, why they are hurting and can’t find their identity or place in the world.

And the elderly, well, we ship them out too. Visit them a couple times a year, unless of course, there is a pandemic then we can’t see them “for their own good,”

not for our convenience, of course. And now, with the invention of suicide pods, we can send them off without any pain – aren't we so compassionate?

Now please understand me. I am not saying day cares, and nursing homes are bad. I am saying that they *can* be used as a tool to dismiss the too young or too old from our thoughts and lives – and I have seen it done, sadly. But again, I have often seen them used faithfully to give a family or aging parent what they need, and plenty of healthy social interaction. Again, my point, even if perhaps overstated: is that I think we struggle with what to do with age.

And here in the Church we are not immune to this. Is that kid too noisy? “Better make Children’s Church so they have their own room, instead of being with the body of believers and learning what the Church does.” And the elderly, ugh, I have a hard time not cringing at how disparagingly we in the Church talk about the elderly sometimes. “We don’t want to be your grandma’s church!” My grandmas prayed for me, like, everyday and died faithful and longing to see their Savior – If our Church produces fruit like that – God be praised! “Attendance is good but it’s a lot of gray hairs” So what! Are they not children of God who he wants to receive his gifts? “We need to appeal to a younger audience.” But Churches have been doing that for 30 years and still shrinking. So maybe, we just be faithful and if the younger generation is too busy or too ignorant to see the relevancy of the Gospel then that’s on their heads – and that’s worse than gray hairs. “But Pastor the

Church will die!” No it won’t – the gates of hell will not overcome Christ’s Church. Even as it is growing around the world.

But I get it, the congregations will die without a new generation. Yes, maybe. But does that mean this was a waste? Or can we celebrate that people from the womb to the grave received the goodness of God and Hope of everlasting life, here, and in our Churches? It is good and pious to want the Light of the Gospel to shine and grow, (and believe me, no one wants it to grow more than us pastors – we blame ourselves when it doesn’t). And yes, it is a blessing (and a command!) to pass the Good News onto the next generation. I am not making excuses to say we shouldn’t spread the Gospel – by no means! But let’s not shill out to the masses if it sacrifices faithfulness and service to people in the here and now.

And so no, I do not think we are immune to these conundrums and views. As the disciples didn’t want the little ones to bother the Master, and as all sinful people struggle to honor Father and Mother. We are not immune to these struggles.

But this brings us back to Christmas. Back to Mary, Elizabeth, and a few little babies. There are a lot of generations there - remember Elizabeth was older, past childbearing age. And yet God works for and in each of them. Jesus’ presence is there for each of them.

And he comes then for each of us. From the child making noise, or just a clump of cells, to the gray hairs, or no hairs. To the teenager who feels immortal, doesn't have a care in the world, and doesn't seem why they need to worry about God right now, to the one watching horrified as the years have got past them and they are approaching the downhill slide of life. To the family too busy to think because it's appointment after practice after program, to the one alone at the nursing home who no one comes to visit.

He loves us all. He came for all. And of course we cannot forget, he died for all. Jesus didn't just show up at Christmas, or the annunciation, the Son of God has always been around, but he takes on flesh and that flesh which was still being formed would grow, be born at Christmas, and then grow in stature and wisdom. He would experience the friends, the family, the traditions. But also the pain, the heartache, the abandonment. He would fulfill his name's purpose and be the Savior of the World. Jesus – Yeshua – Joshua, means “Yahweh (God) Saves.” And boy does He in Jesus.

God promised a Savior and the people waited lifetimes. But God kept his promise. God promised the Savior would die and Rise and he kept that promise. He has made promises to you, that you, no matter your age, ethnicity, ability, fears, sins, male or female, doubts, depression, or confusion – He has promised that you matter. Jesus came for all, not just 1 to 92. And maybe that should change how we

look at others. Even those who aren't like us. Maybe we can see them, not as someone who "doesn't get it," or someone who is "crazy," or a lazy bum, but maybe as someone Jesus came and died for. Maybe someone who needs his light and truth and mercy, like we do.

And for we who celebrate this goodness and light and confess our need for his mercy and celebrate that he gives it – let's remember his promises to us: all his children in faith, he has promised that you are forgiven and that you have eternal life. He will keep those promises too. He always keeps his promises. So maybe that can change how we view ourselves. We belong to the King – the Savior, we are blessed. We can be joyful we can be brave. It was right there in verse 45: "Blessed is she who believes that there would be a fulfilment of what was spoken to her from the Lord."

As we grow older well, Moses writes "teach me to number my days oh, Lord." But it doesn't have to be fearful or depressing so much, because he has won for us unnumbered days. And so the antidote to the midlife crisis and the depression of the unrelenting march of time is the promise of eternal life from the One in charge of time. And I know that promise is for you – because, as we already said, Christmas is for everyone – even you. Amen.

