

# LIGHT SHOWS AND ORGAN MUSIC:



## UNPACKING THE WORSHIP WARS AND THE MYSTERY OF YOUNG ADULTS IN THE CHURCH

### THE TWO GREAT YEARNINGS IN THE JOURNEY OF YOUNG ADULTS:

- "...the dance of self and other in the story of human becoming might best be understood as reflecting 'two great yearnings': one for differentiation, autonomy, and agency, and the other for relation, belonging, and communion."

-from *Big Questions Worthy Dreams*, by Sharon Daloz Parks, k. p. 49.

*Those in the group of young adults known as 20-somethings need an active truth, a living faith, they don't just want to hear you say us believe something, they want to see us live it out. Truth is only true when it is acted upon, it's not enough to give mental assent to it. The church will start reaching those in this age demographic only when it decides what it's mission as a body is and starts to live into that.*

## Worship Wars and Discipleship

There's a prevailing sentiment that young people, that elusive group of people that churches seem to be nonplussed about how to bring back, don't like traditional churches with liturgy, organ music, and so forth. One blogger I read recently claimed that no one under thirty would go to a church for the pipe organ, while I've heard similar misgivings from people within our own diocese. From expensive pipe organs on one end to light shows with a full band in the church, which end of the continuum is more successful?

I invite you to play with an idea for a minute. These worship wars are a smoke screen. All of them in their own way are the hunt for the "hot" thing—the gimmick, if you will—that will bring young people back into the church. I don't think any of it really matters. People come into the church when they are connected with people who care about them. People become Christians when they are disciplined by people who are already Christians.

Yes, we should do our services with excellence, the music we have should be glorifying to God, but that can take a number of different forms. Different communities will have different identities and that's okay. The important question to ask is not how to integrate guitars with the pipe organ if that's what's working for you, or how to go out and buy a pipe organ if you've been successful with a worship band. The question is: Is our church making disciples? Because that, my friends, is the only way that the church is truly the church.

The second idea to play with this idea of discipleship. I think that the term discipleship is something that perhaps has lost its meaning in the church in America. But consid-

The definition of 20-something is easy on one level as it refers to people in their twenties. On the other hand getting a grasp or complete picture of this varied group of our population is far more complex.

Young adults are anything from new college graduates to that younger couple with the new baby in your church, to the almost 30 year-olds with several young children who got married right out of college, to young single professionals who are nearing their 30's.

Young adults today frequently change careers, go back to school, move back in with their parents, all in the process of trying to figure out just what it is they actually want to do, a process that is now more removed from college and set in the post-college setting where young adults are still trying on some options to figure out what best suits them in life.

"It is my conviction that the central work of the young adult era in the cycle of human life is not located in any of these tasks per se. Rather the promise and vulnerability of young adulthood lie in the experience of the birth of critical awareness and the dissolution and recomposition of the meaning of self, other, world, and 'God.' This work has enormous consequences for the years of adulthood to follow. Young adulthood is rightfully a time of asking big questions and discovering worthy dreams."

-from *Big Questions, Worthy Dreams*. Sharon Daloz Parks. p. 5.

ering that it was the thrust of Jesus command to us in the Great Commission (Matt 28:19-20), I think that the idea and the practice of discipleship is something we need to keep fresh and keep in front of us always.

Simply put, discipleship is helping people along in the way of Jesus. It doesn't require a seminary degree, it doesn't require you to memorize vast portions of the Bible. It's enough that you follow Jesus, and are willing to invite other people into this journey as well. You can teach about Jesus because you've experienced him in your life. You after all, are something of an authority on your own story and the miles you've journeyed with Jesus in the past. This is where to start.

Discipleship is about intentional inclusion and invitation. I think it's the second part we have some problems with. Generally as a church, and if I even go closer and say as a diocese, we do better at including people who show up to our churches, or we at least include them in theory. It's one thing to be open to anyone coming to church, it's another thing to purposefully start living your life alongside people outside the church, not simply to eventually lure them into the church, but to be that first contact of Christian fellowship, Christian love, that may indeed eventually lead to that person, young or old becoming a part of the church you worship at. Wouldn't it be a wonderful if Episcopal Christians all over Middle Tennessee to start living life in relationship with people in there sphere of influence, Christian, non-Christian, regardless of viewpoint or denominational affiliation?

What would that look like? I can't even begin to imagine how amazing that would be. Oh, and we'll end up with more people in our churches too. But that can't be the goal we start out with or we'll approach new friendships with an agenda, and if our agenda is anything other than friendship, allowing the truth of what we know about Jesus to come out just as part of our lives, then we will be using that person as a means to an end. And that, friends, would be something I think would actually be out of line with the instructions our Savior left for us in his Commission.



### Will we see them?

Something new has developed on the continuum from childhood to adulthood in the emergence of the 20-something. In this time period one makes many major life decisions, changes careers, possi-

bly gets married. And somewhere in the middle of all of that there can come a mid-20's crisis. This is when the young adult realizes that their first career choice isn't what they wanted and they change direction sometimes drastically to try out something else.

Changes in the workplace also lend themselves to job hopping as the notion of company loyalty is all but a nostalgic thing of years gone by. Companies often feel less like teams and families and more like means to an end to the 20-something, and so they move on to the next one after a year or two, feeling they've gotten everything out of the company that they can.

This is still an unsettling time in many ways as there always seems to be one more decision right around the corner.

### Understanding Truth

Young adults have an conception of truth which is possibly different than what you or I think when we hear the word. It actually gets back to the original meaning in Latin for the word *credo* translated "I believe." Literally, however, *credo* means "I take to heart" something that involves far more than cognition. Young adults won't believe you when you say you believe something if you're not doing it. To be true, it has to be lived out.

This is a great gift and a great challenge that young adults offer us. It's far too easy to think it's good enough to mentally assent to something we know to be true and then go on our merry way without asking how it impacts our lives. Whole churches can get this way at times. But young adults won't put up with this, they want to see something living and active, something real, a faith with some meat on its proverbial bones. If we as the church can rise to the occasion, we won't be asking questions about where the 18-35 year olds are, and there's no need for special drives to recruit young adults into the church. If the church is doing its mission, taking to heart its faith, and thereby living out the gospel, the younger folks will start coming.

Of course, they'll need mentoring, but creating a context for mentoring is really just another way to talk about discipling, and when we have active disciples who actively make disciples, I believe we'll have plenty of young adults where ever we turn.

"Naming the power, vulnerability, and inherent ambivalence of young adult faith helps us recognize it when it arises in our midst. If we understand it's articulate nature and special hunger for mentors and mentoring communities, we are better able to respond. There is much at stake--for young adults and for the life of the commons--in whether or not we do this well. Never before in the human life cycle (and never again) is there the same developmental readiness for asking big questions and forming worthy dreams. In every generation the renewal of human life is dependent significant measure upon the questions that are posed to us during this era in our meaning-making. The dreams those questions seed yield the promise of our shared future."

-Sharon Daloz Parks. *Big Questions Worthy Dreams.*