

CHALLENGING OUR YOUTH TO FAITH

Acts 16:1-5 2Timothy 1:1-10

No one dares deny that we live in a world of rapid change. Some changes are for the better while others are for the worse. Ever since astronauts landed on the moon the world has never been the same. There has been rapid advance in science and medicine with scientist working almost around the clock to find cures for dreaded diseases including cancer and HIV Aids. Computers and robots have taken a central place in industries, homes, recreation, religious and educational institutions. The “information highway” can either makes or break us. In 1970, Alvin Toffler wrote a best seller, entitled “Future Shock”. Toffler wrote,

We are creating a new society, not a changed society, not an extended larger-than-life version of our present society. Unless we understand this we shall destroy ourselves in trying to cope with tomorrow. ... We are simultaneously experiencing a youth revolution, a sexual revolution, a racial revolution, a colonial revolution, an economic revolution, and the most rapid and deep-going technological in history ... the new age creates serious stress.

Toffler was “right- on”, in his predictions. I will not elaborate on the stress factor here. Rather, I have other crucial concerns. But my main concern is the deterioration of moral values within our society. Children no longer respect their parents or their elders and the establishment is largely responsible for this state of affairs. The Bible says, “honour your father and your mother that your days may be long upon the land that the Lord your God is giving you”. The establishment says, “dishonour your parents and we will give you welfare, or put you under the care of the Children’s Aid Society. And if you continue to be unruly we will send you to juvenile prison and there after become a menace to society.” Listen to some of the lyrics being belted out on our radio and television stations, or the CDs and videos our children and youth are listening to and are viewing. These should give a good indication of how depraved and inconsiderate the society has become and is becoming. Parents who sometimes try to discipline their children are met with a barrage of abusive and expletive language and the threat to call the police. I heard a story from someone not so long ago of a father, a relative of his, who upon coming home after a very hard and trying day at work was met with the deafening blast from his son’s Sound System. He asked his son if he would tone down the music. The son took a baseball bat to the head of his dad, beating him to death.

Not too long ago, the news media reported the arrest of a Vancouver young man and his friend. The pair murdered the young man’s parents with the hope of collecting Insurance money. Recent reports also show grave concerns for the amount of child pornography,

racism and hate available on the internet and elsewhere. Our world seems to be going headlong into more and more moral decay and no doubt into destruction.

The question at this point is, how can we regain our youth to sanity and ethical values? Since I'm in the business of religion and spirituality, I personally advocate, "back to the Bible, back to church, back to God." These days there is a lot of talk concerning taking religion out of the school. In fact one may say that religion has been taken out of the schools. It is no wonder then that moral values have deteriorated to the very low ebb it has reached. It seems to me that a majority of young people and adults no longer have a sense of sin, judgement, righteousness or justice; to say nothing of family values.

At this juncture I would like to introduce to you a young man. His name is Timothy. Timothy was born in Lystra, in Asia Minor. His father was a pagan and his mother a Jewish Christian named Eunice. Timothy's grandmother Lois had a lot to do in his upbringing. She taught him the Christian faith and values. In Paul's second letter to Timothy, he writes,

I am reminded of your sincere faith, a faith that lived first in your grand mother Lois and your mother Eunice and now I am sure, lives in you. For this reason, I remind you to rekindle the gift of God that is within you through the laying on of my hands; for God did not give us a spirit of cowardice, but rather a spirit of power and love and of self-discipline. (2 Tim.1:5-7)

Earlier, Paul had written to encourage young Timothy, "Let no one despise your youth, but set the believers an example in speech and conduct, in love, in faith, in purity." (1 Tim. 4:12) What confidence for an older person to have in one who is but a youth! Timothy was not only the secretary and helper to Paul on his missionary journeys according to Acts 16: 1-4, but was an organizer (Acts 20:46) and in charge of the churches in Ephesus.

If you are going to justify the confidence that others have in you, you will have to prove to them and to yourselves that you are capable of rising to a certain level of maturity, be you very young or older. True, some older people are much more immature than some younger ones. It is also true that we will have more youth involvement in church and society if we train them properly and give them more responsibilities. If however, youth is to earn that confidence that others have in you and become more effective, you will have to be more realistic about the church, about the world in which we live as well as relationships with the people within it.

The changes of which Toffler speaks in his book, Future Shock, have not only come upon us very rapidly, but have pressed upon us so deeply that we are completely stressed out and full of uncertainties. It is like the fellow who runs for dear life to catch a bus. He rushes through the line into the bus, perspiring and panting for breath, slumps into a seat, looks around and then asks, "Where is this bus going any way?" This exactly is what modern life has brought upon us... a life in which there are so many changes that we cannot even make up our minds on the direction we are going.

The gap between the young and the old is growing wider and wider. Young people today are being exposed to knowledge that their parents have never even dreamed of. Yet, it seems that many of these young people have the feeling that because they have a job in a fast food restaurant or that they can get on welfare without any difficulty, they no longer need parents, the church or even the school. Peer pressure, drugs, alcohol and illicit sex become their main area of concentration. If they survive, these are the same people who will become and are becoming the parents of another lost generation.

Let me however hasten to point out that not all youth waste their lives in idle dalliance. Right here in this community of faith and beyond I am certain there are numbers of youth who want to live and are living meaningful lives. But these are but a representative sample of millions of others. Good parents and a caring and loving community make all the difference in those lives.

Today, it is cool to go with the crowd who say that to believe in God is passé. The painful truth is that the world has become so secularized that any thing to do with God or the church has been relegated to the dump heap of our thinking. I want to challenge you, the youth today, that God is, that God cares and that God loves you. I want to further challenge you, that in spite of the fact that we live in a secularized world, we should continue to proclaim our faith in God who is the God not only of young Timothy, but the God, Provider and Redeemer of each and every one present here today. This being the case, we are hereby obliged to rescue and inculcate those values that are being thrown out through the window. We will have to recognize in spite of the secularization of life, that we are always precious in God's sight.

I urge every one to claim your rightful place in the community of faith. Stand up and be counted. Testify concerning the quality of your faith. And may the God of peace and love be with you, now and always.
Amen!