

## Can We Try Something New – Youth Sunday 2015

Ten fingers, ten toes.

A wiggling bundle of mystery, taking their pioneering steps into history.

Eyes widen with wonder as they take in the world for the first time.

Their initial cries bounce off the walls,

fresh lungs, pounding heart;

a rushing start to something scary and beautiful,

powerful like their grip around your finger.

You want to linger in that moment and return that wondrous gaze,

the haze of torturous months behind you,

emotions surround you, engulfed in the moment:

you're finally here.

That newborn gripped tight in your arms,

you know that this world harms but no cause for alarm

because I've got you. You are mine.

That trickster of time treks ahead quickly;

cutting their first tooth and fingers that are sticky.

Spaghetti sauce and finger-paint.

Dirty diapers and pots of coffee to stay up late.

You didn't know what tired was before.

All these extra chores, your back is sore,

"Mommy can I have some more?" But it's worth it.

Every question that they bring you, every "what's that?" gets to make you

an expert in the world around you. A tour guide to the planet.

Learning how to tie their shoes, it's the first day of school,  
it's science projects and "clean your room."  
Marching band, choir practice, wetting the sheets,  
Big Bird, Sponge Bob, and these tiny soccer cleats.  
Broken bones and broken hearts,  
Mother's Day gifts that are works of art you display proudly on the refrigerator.  
Next to good grades they worked so hard for.  
Next to little league pictures and clay handprints,  
a wall of accomplishments passing in a New York minute.  
You see them blossom and grow, he has your father's nose,  
but her mother's smile, and you're with them every mile,  
every milestone, every meeting – man, when did life become this fleeting?

Where did the time go?

But with every inch they grow, every new venture, there's adventure in their eyes.  
A passion for tomorrow that cannot be disguised.  
An eagerness to run the race before them – to seek the Master's plan.  
And as you cheer them forward, remember, the baton is in your hand.  
As they grow, too fast before you, they stretch in a stance of speediness,  
inclined on the incline ahead, awaiting the pass from your hand.  
So let's examine where we stand.  
Are you in the cheering section or was this not the team you'd planned?  
Sure, they're cute when they are little, and they have their moments in the middle –  
but to take them as adults now, isn't that kind of a riddle?

Millennials are notorious as idle narcissists,  
with Twitter updates and Instagram pics of the latte that you just got at Starbucks,  
as if we'd somehow forgotten what the cups looked like.  
It's favorites and Likes, follows and friend requests,  
filtered selfies while privately messed,  
overmedicated but still depressed,  
attention spans compressed.  
So much promise but rarely live up to their ability.  
Emotional fragility.  
Administrative hostility.  
And don't get me started on how they hijacked the word "literally."

Materialistic and cynic, unmotivated and unbeknown,  
everyone gets a trophy so nobody's outshone,  
still living at home, attached at your hipbone  
but you can't get their attention because they won't put down their iPhone.  
I'll admit it – there's definitely a stigma.  
But is their substance to the stories?  
This world a present presented to us, but have we taken inventories?  
This planet is broken, at best. And I do not jest  
while I stand blessed in Sunday dress, we face the ultimate stress test,  
tasked these challenged while unimpressed, repossessed.  
We had some strikes against us before we even came to bat;  
debts and broken economy, wars and sickness, poverty;  
climate change, and a congress that is flat,

but since I'm standing behind a pulpit, we're not going to get into that.

This is our race – our bitter pill, our battle uphill, pushing on still.

Yet that promise in our eyes has not been extinguished.

The fire on those fresh faces cannot be relinquished.

Though the prospects may seem chilling, there is hope for us – God willing.

Unwilling to go through life unfulfilling,

regardless of who is responsible for the billing. There is work to be done.

We deserve some of our criticism but I ask you grant us a breather.

Keep in mind – I'm sure your parent's generation wasn't too impressed with any of you either.

Judged on your clothes or music, or you heard "cut your hair, you hippie."

We're all familiar with times when assumptions are made about us in a jiffy.

I've looked it up, I've seen the stats – please know that I'm not crazy.

Even Socrates was complaining about how he thought youth were lazy.

It is far from uncommon to be uninspired

by those that will carry the torch once you've retired.

But mutiny was not conspired.

We have merely acquired some newfangled ways of thinking.

Despite your confidence shrinking,

our youth have me thinking that maybe this planet is going to be all right.

I sleep better at night when I work alongside these kids

and I see their fight to make this world a better place for everybody.

And how everybody is a somebody,

and nobody is a nobody.  
They innovate socially,  
speculate openly,  
share themselves vocally – so much more than 140 characters at a time.  
Some are woefully kind and they have it in mind  
that they can make a difference, somewhere, somehow - how sublime.  
An encouragement to my heart that cannot be expressed properly in rhyme.  
This generation has transformed connectivity,  
shows compassion and sensitivity,  
holistic inclusivity - there is worth without a price.  
And when I consider some of these trademarks, it reminds me of Christ.

Today's Scripture shows God equipping and anointing the young:  
one boy naïve to the voice of God as he tries to fall asleep at night.  
One thought too young to be considered king, so he was put in the pastures to be out  
of sight.  
One commissioned to lead his church, and despite his age, be a bearer of the Light.  
Samuel, David, Timothy – celebrated, legendary,  
each of them called in their youth. And I'll tell you the truth,  
God had little regard for the number of candles on their birthday cake.  
For heaven's sake.

Age becomes inconsequential,  
the spirit of God has unlimited potential,  
and just a willing heart is quintessential and God takes care of the rest.  
Yet the Father seems to find it best to put young people to the test.

These three men are merely a sample,  
go through the Bible and you'll find there are ample examples  
of not-so-minor minors becoming refiners of the faith.

Like the three Hebrew boys that faced Nebuchadnezzar's fire,  
or Joseph, who remained faithful, never bending to desire.  
Josiah or Jeremiah, who found God despite being cast as a social pariah.  
Ruth displayed loyalty, overcame adversity,  
Esther showed boldness even when up against uncertainty.  
Young fishers leaving their nets markedly, extending discipleship to the brothers;  
Joshua, Jonathan, Solomon, even Jesus' own mother.  
God impelled them in their infancy,  
propelled them to their brow  
and I don't find it farfetched to think that God still calls young people now.

To you, my bright and shining student, my affirmation is avowed.  
These are *our* youth, our now and future church, and church, you should be proud.  
Don't give up on us – there's hope for us yet.  
That hope is worth your clinging and you'll see how it rewards you:  
that same assurance that you felt as that youngster toddled towards you.

Now do we run towards God like children,  
with outstretched fingers and open palms?  
Get pulled into his lap and feel how a Father's embrace calms?  
He calls for faith like a child because a child sees the world anew.  
New possibilities & contemplation,

new steadfastness and determination,  
willing for formation, renewed aspirations,  
forsaking condemnation because the old is gone and the *new* has come.  
Renewed perspective and direction,  
renewed assurance and introspection,  
renewed confidence and connection.

It's not faith like a grown up because grown ups tend to get stuck:  
stuck in our thinking, stuck in our time,  
stuck in the ways it was done in our prime.  
It's not a crime but a time of revival calls for restitution of the mind  
to a different kind of attitude.  
One of grace and gratitude.  
Willingness despite the latitude.  
An adolescent faith is one that's still malleable,  
it recognizes the guidance of God as invaluable;  
it's clay that gives way to the press of the Potter's hands.

I watch these kids strive and I'm constantly reminded  
to never be blinded to my own need for renewal.  
Replenishment of spirit, a refilling rebirth,  
rejuvenation rekindled, a reminder of my worth.  
We are called to die to self but we do not stay deceased,  
we are released, given a new lease –  
each time we humbly bring our brokenness to his feet.  
We are made new. We are made young again.

That's what I want for us, my friend.  
The courageousness and boldness  
as we're transformed into holiness,  
powered by God's Spirit to step outside our cautious range,  
and that's my challenge to all of us this morning:  
"can we try something *new* for a change?"

- Trish Bradley

