

During the week I drove up to the northeast side of town where the new Senior Services Center is located. It is a lovely, brand-new campus and one of their buildings is an Intergenerational Center where preschoolers and older adults have the opportunity to connect. See kiddos learning letters and numbers while playing Bingo with older partners. Watch wrinkled hands water coloring with tiny hands. Hear about a 4-year-old who enthusiastically tells everyone that the 95 year old lady in the wheelchair is her best friend. There's something about intergenerational relationships that sparks purpose. Suddenly, tired bodies spring back to life. Old eyes brighten up. It's the joy of a genuine friendship. Jesus says, "Abide in me—in my love—and keep loving each other as my primary commandment. I tell you these things as my genuine friends, so that your joy may be complete."

Begin by thinking about what makes someone a friend. Maybe the person is safe. Maybe they "get me." Maybe they listen well, or they are someone we can be authentically ourselves around. Remarkably, Jesus uses the same language to describe his relationship to us. He says he doesn't choose disciples to be his servants or subjects. He doesn't even call them his disciples. Instead, he calls them his "friends." There is a difference between being a servant and a friend, isn't there? A servant takes orders and is subservient to the person they are under. But with a friendship there is no hierarchy—everyone is both teacher and student. Jesus tells his disciples that our relationship with him isn't transactional—where as long as we do what we are told we will be rewarded. No. The commandment is to love each other because the reward is the relationship. "You aren't my servants," Jesus says. "You are my friends."

But here's the tricky part. It's hard to become friends with someone we don't really know. Friendships aren't always forged easily. Especially between those who are older and those who are younger. Let's be honest, as a parent of teens and tweens, I'm—how do you say it—outdated. It isn't easy to feel a commonality with a teenager while they are tethered to their screens and give one-word answers to our questions. And it's hard to speak with old people who don't know what "slay" means or how to change their ringtones. It's hard to connect when our worlds are so different. I mean, what do young people know about getting old? They don't know what it is like to feel like the world has left them behind. Or how the years slip by like they are on a zipline. Nor do they know the feeling of attending more friend's funerals in a year than friends birthday parties. They don't know...at least not yet. If we older folk remember back, what did we think of older people when we were young? I remember hearing looking at someone in their forties thinking they were ancient! Perhaps it is hard to forge relationships between the young and old, because, really, what do we have in common?

Except, when it comes to church, we are called to be an intergenerational community. Not just a multi-generational community, but as intergenerational one. When we baptized our kiddos we promised to help their parents to raise them in faith. When we confirmed our youth a few months ago—we became confirmed for mission ourselves with them because we are called to be in mission together. But it's not easy to keep these promises, is it? It is much easier to start up a youth program and hire a Youth pastor to handle their needs than it is to chip away at forming these relationships ourselves. And the effort goes both ways. Some of you know that one of our deacons, Tom, sneaks back to the kitchen halfway through the service to set things up for us. Well, for the past couple of years he's had a helper. Every Sunday when Paxson sees Tom head back, he heads back to help him set up. When they get done setting up, sometimes they chat

about life or in one case Tom said Paxson taught him how to throw a football. One Sunday Tom headed back just like he usually does. Except it was a communion Sunday and as Paxson saw this, he became concerned that Tom didn't get communion. So he grabbed an extra communion kit, headed back and said, "I noticed you didn't get communion so I brought it to you." And then in a rather ordinary way, Paxson began reciting the words of ritual as he recalled them: "On the night when Jesus was betrayed..." and he served Tom communion. Not because he was Tom's servant, but because he was Tom's friend. And that's what friends do. Yesterday, on the rainy day, Paxson asked if he could invite Tom over for a playdate! True story! The relationship flows both ways and it becomes a genuine friendship.

We have an amazing gift in this church. We are intergenerational. Not just multi-generational, but intergenerational. We all felt it during confirmation—during the pilgrimage on the margins and the talent show. Or just look at our choir! Older people, you get a chance to make music with young people! The question is: how do we keep the intergenerational momentum going? So there's this new piece of furniture in the sanctuary. We moved up a table and a few chairs so kids can have space to be a part of worship without their being totally bored! And their parents can have a second to breathe. And when the intergenerational spirit working, what is the feeling in the room? It's joy! So to our youth: you are leaders. So help lead and seek people out. After all, this is your church. And to our older folk: you are amazing! Not you *were amazing at one time long ago in a galaxy far, far away!* No, you are amazing now! So seek them out. And please know: our youth are paying attention to what you do, and how you live out the gospel.

We blessed to be an intergenerational church. So now we practice making space for each other. Young people, find an older person. Old person, find a younger person. And share a story about what brings you joy these days. And then what is something we as a church could do together to foster intergenerational friendships.