

3066 Bridging Ceremony

Planning Committee Sponsored

Meditation given at General Assembly Bridging Ceremony
Rev. William G. Sinkford

Birth, youth, adulthood, old age, death. The cycle of life continues as the generations follow one another in a rhythm the human community has known as long as there has been a human community. Religious communities help us mark these passages in our lives, help us celebrate and remember the bridges we cross. It is a real privilege to be here with you tonight, with all of you: those of you who will shortly celebrate the passage from youth to young adulthood, those young adults who will walk with you, the parents, relatives and friends who have come to witness, and the others of us who are here because we long so deeply for you to continue your journey of searching and service in our midst.

Memories will be created here tonight. For the Bridgers, personal memories of this ceremony of transition. For parents, personal memories of joy, pride, and loss (witnessing the growth of a child into adulthood means that child, as a child, will live for us only in memory). For the gathered community, memories of possibility and of hope. Because this ceremony calls out in us the possibilities, the potential we can realize together.

Memories. I remember my own mother talking quietly to me when I was about your age. She talked of the hopes of her youth, the dreams of her generation to leave this world a better place for those of my generation to inherit. My generation, too, had those dreams. She talked of the reality that her generation had left so much undone. They had lived, most of the time, caught up in the necessities of life. The things that had to be done. She spoke with a sense of...almost failure. My generation, too, knows that, despite our dreams and our commitment, we bequeath to you a world still in need of restoration. Such will always be the case. The work of healing the world is ever before us. My mother spoke of the possibility of a Brighter Coming Day and told me that my generation had the education and the love to make a difference. Perhaps we have. In some ways I think we have. But I would echo my mother's words to you.

You can do better than we have. You can see the world through your own new eyes. You can imagine new ways that we cannot see. Those in my generation have looked and searched for so long. Too often we see only what we expect to see.

Memories. I remember one Youth Sunday service at my home church when I was still in LRY. Several of the youth and young adults of the congregation put together a service we thought would transform the place. Everything we did was different. We approached the pulpit not down the central aisle, but from the four corners of the sanctuary (perhaps an early honoring of earth centered traditions, though we did not do it for that reason). Not a sermon, but a conversation. We played our music, some of it taped (a scandal in a congregation which prided itself on superb quality live classical music). "Our music" was folk music at that time. "The times they are a-changin."

And what did we have to say? We said that we had found real meaning in the intimacy of the youth group, intimacy that we didn't often find in that sanctuary. We said that we, often, didn't really feel welcomed. We said that we heard plenty of lectures in school, we didn't need to hear them in church. We wondered why none of us had been asked to serve on committees, even the Board of Trustees. Any of this sound familiar?

What we wanted, I think, was to be invited "in". To be invited "in" by the older members. An invitation to join, yes. But an invitation extended from the heart with real generosity of spirit. An invitation extended with the full knowledge that we would change things, try things, succeed and fail. An invitation extended with the full knowledge that adults, as hard as they had worked and as meaningful as the community was for them...the full knowledge of the adult community that our presence would mean change.

To the Bridgers, on behalf of this large family of faith, I extend to you that invitation. Come in. Be with us. Try things, succeed and fail. We certainly have. Change us.

Your task is simply to bring yourselves, bring your hopes, your dreams, your energy, your needs. Our task, though perhaps hard for us, is also simple. Our task is to welcome you, to exercise the sometimes-difficult discipline of a radical hospitality.

You see, my mother was right. We leave much for you to do.

But my mother said one other thing. She said that she still had it in her to make a difference. She said that she was willing to learn from me, as I had learned so much from her. We could work together.

As you cross this bridge into adulthood, be not afraid. You do not walk alone. And we will be there to welcome you on the other side.