

To An Unknown GOD
Reflections on the ECO of Presbyterians National Gathering
Acts 17:16-28
Rev. Dr. Kim Engelmann
West Valley Presbyterian Church

We had a great National Gathering in Greenville South Carolina!
Todd went too, and it was truly inspiring.
Here are some pictures scrolling that will give you a taste of the time we had.
(pics)



I was reminded of how Presbyterian I am when I was there. And how Presbyterianism goes way back in my bloodline.

One of the main speakers was a guy name Jim Singleton.



He approached me when he saw me there and greeted me warmly. I had no idea how he knew me, and at the time didn't even realize he was one of the main speakers at the conference.

So I was polite, I nodded, and then he spoke to the entire assembly gathered there on Wednesday I especially liked his talk because it was all about how scripture validates women in the ministry.

Jim is on the faculty at Gordon Conwell and actually that seminary is very conservative and many do not see men and women as serving together equally. So he has his work cut out for him as an advocate for women

Well, I went up to him afterward to tell him thank you for that talk. And he points at me and says, "Oh I see her in you! Yes I do." And I am like "this guy is weird"...and I laughed awkwardly.. Then he finally explained

Yes! I see your grandmother in you...and it was her chocolate chip cookies that got me through my pastorate at the church on Whitworth University Campus in the early 90's. I lived right next to her...and she always brought them to me...I loved those cookies!

Oh my gosh. Now I understood. My grandfather had been the Whitworth pastor there before he died...and my grandmother was still living in the house they bought right across from the church...

Jim said, "I don't think I would have stayed in that pastorate if it hadn't been for those cookies!!"

I remembered those cookies.

At the time I was living on the East Coast and she would send them to me in a box...and by the time they got to me they were harder than rocks...

But I was glad to know that evidently they had started out tasting good...in WA state.

And they had helped Jim stay in the ministry – not many cookies have that claim to fame!

Thank you grandma...

But that gives you a sense of the connections, the rekindling of relationships, and the ongoing sort of network that continues to build in ECO...very positive, and very passionate about Jesus Christ and building flourishing churches together. I met many wonderful people...

Today, for this meditation, I want to share with you something I touched on in the Service Worship meditation this past Sunday– it was so brief – I wanted to

embellish it and tell you about it again – and its from the talk that was most helpful to me -- by

James Choung (picture) who is a prolific writer and speaker...in Christianity Today, Leadership Journal and Outreach Magazine. James Choung serves as National Director of Evangelism at InterVarsity Christian Fellowship USA, and has written both *True Story: A Christianity Worth Believing In* and its follow-up, *Real Life: A Christianity Worth Living Out*.



Now if you notice, the scripture that we read this morning was all about Paul trying to communicate the gospel to people in a pagan culture. A culture that didn't know who God was...not too different then our own culture...

So what does Paul do? He doesn't just lather on the gospel from his own perspective. Rather, he appeals to the statue of "an unknown God"...and he appeals to the poets of the time...quoting them to make an evangelistic point... he knew their writings...this is what your poets wrote, and they point to who God really is...*in him we live and move and have our being*

Because Paul knew the culture he was in and he appealed to the questions they were asking about this unknown God...

And I think as Christians, and as a church if we don't know the culture we are in, we can't possibly communicate who God is effectively.

And as we become a more invitational church which I want to emphasize in 2017, (I shared with the Session yesterday) we need to know who it is that we are talking to, and understand our cultural context...

James led us through the spiritual question that people are asking...depending on when they were born.

Funny...these questions seem rotate every hundred years or so with the same frequency according to a sociological study that James cited. So every 20 years or so, These questions will come up again, and again and again...

If you were born before **1943** your were part of a generation that Tom Brokaw called the "**Greatest generation**". Your generation according to him was the last generation to truly trust others, and you worked out of a Christian value system that was not questioned. It was assumed.

<u>Born</u>	<u>Known as</u>	<u>Spiritual Orientation</u>
Before 1943	The Greatest Generation	Trust others
1943 – 1962	Baby Boomers	“What is Truth?”
1963 – 1985	Generation X	“What is Real?”
1985 – 2004	Millennials	“What is Good?”
<i>Millennials LOVE older people!</i>		
After 2004	Post-Millennials (the iGeneration?)	What is Beautiful or What Inspires Awe?

Now if you were born between **1943-1962** you are a **Baby Boomer**. And Baby Boomers grew up at a time when there was a quest for objective truth.

The “spiritual” question of the day that baby boomers grew up with is “**What is truth?**” And if you found out what you believed was true, you would orient yourself around that truth.

So back then we had these big Christian crusades (Billy Graham) and if I could convince you that Jesus was true then you would change your life. So in order to grab the Baby Boomer Generation arguments...logical arguments, and things that made sense...would cause me to pause, re-evaluate and possibly change my life.

So we loved CS Lewis, and Josh McDowell – the Case for Christ. Because they wrote in a way that made the gospel logical...objective truth.

ENTER NOW... **Generation X** as it is called.

These are people who were born between **1963-1985**

And now the big spiritual question changes.

This was the beginning of what many call the post- modern (or post-Christian) era and truth was at this time relativized.

There was no objective truth anymore.

About this time Einstein's theory of relativity was coming out – and this impacted this relativistic view of everything

If you've ever heard someone say...

What you believe may be good for you; what you believe in is fine; but it's not for me. (it is relativized by my subjectivity) – it's probably an Xer saying that Don't give me CS LEWIS or Josh McDowell.

Generation X says...I don't care about the question "What is Truth?". I want Authenticity.

So the big question for Generation Xers is "**What is Real?**"

Anything that is packaged, I will chafe against it.

And Generation Xers can sniff out "fake" people inauthentic systems better than anyone else.

Have them buy your used car...

If some of you remember back then, many of those big tele-evangelists were falling off of their pedestals...Like Jim Bakker and Jimmy Swaggert.

And the abuses of the Catholic church were on the rise then too.

So for the Generation Xers, there is huge distrust of institutions and BIG church is bad.

And as I said last Sunday, this is why Service Worship works for the Xers.

If what I say is true, I actually put into action through service, all of a sudden it becomes **real**...it becomes authentic and I might sit up if I am an Xer and take notice.

So if you have an Xer in your life...work on the authenticity factor.

Now enter what we call the **Millennials – 1985-2004**

And a new spiritual question is born! If you have a millennial in your life their question is "**What is good?**"

This generation is very positive, likes small grass roots kind of movements and teamwork, and cooperation.

Albeit this generation tends to be more narcissistic, they really want to make a difference for good in the world.

Which is why Service Worship would work for them as well.

However, they aren't always versed in survival skills like the Xers...(the Xers were latchkey kids...while this generation was more coddled by parents/caregivers so although they want to do good...they don't have a clue how to do it).

And we were told as church leaders at the ECO gathering...to give Millennials the opportunity to lead, even if they fail. So that they can learn how to do the things they want to do and do it well through trial and error.

You see the marketing for the Millennials all over don't you? Millennials have a strong passion for good in the world –

And the marketing people know that the way to draw them in to purchasing something is to say...yeah we're a company...but we give 2% back to the poor... and you see this community service emphasis all over because the younger people tend to buy more in general.

So this is what all that is about.

You want to know what's good? Our company is good because it does ABC...for the poor.

There is another fact about Millennials I think is so important for us at WVPC – an older congregation – to get. **Millennials LOVE older people!**

They seek them out. They think older people are wonderful. (The X'ers don't... ignore them...Millennials do)

So folks! Invite them to things. They will probably come.

But remember the question is WHAT IS GOOD?

So if I am speaking to Millennials I am going to try my darndest to be sure they realize that God is very Good...

We don't know what the next generation's big spiritual question will be. Based on history...the next spiritual question has been predicted by James Choung to be "**What is beautiful?**" or "**What inspires awe?**"....and this question will be linked with a strong passion for justice in the world.

Who knows? We may move from the warehouse church back into the cathedrals of our nation. Whatever that question is, be on the alert, be aware of the culture, and use what you see in the culture, to share the love of Jesus answering the questions that people are asking...Jesus did it all the time

And St. Paul did it in Acts

As we move into communion, I am always struck by how Jesus linked the Passover feast with his last supper with his disciples.

Because Jesus was aware of the culture of his followers, their practices as primarily Jews, and he used their understanding of Passover, to help them understand what he was about to do on the cross

That by the blood of the lamb death was “Passed Over”

That those of us who were enslaved are now set free – back then physically, now spiritually through the forgiveness of our sins

That the manna that sustained God’s people in the wilderness is available to us all, all the time, through Jesus who is the bread of life...

What rich meaning this feast has for us. May God help us to share his truth effectively, by being aware of the questions of our time...

Let us pray...