



YOUNG ADULT SUNDAY

CULTURAL RESOURCES

Sunday, August 11, 2013

William E. Hall, Guest Cultural Resource Commentator
Youth Ministry Manager, Apostolic Church of God, Chicago, IL

Lection – 1 Corinthians 10:13 (New Revised Standard Version)

I. Historical Overview

Today, the focal point of the lectionary is young adults. When we consider young adults, we are focusing on persons ages 18–35 or 18–39, in most black congregations. Young Adults are unique and gifted, yet they are often misunderstood and ostracized in the Church, even if this is done unintentionally. The young adult of today is encountering issues that are not unfamiliar to Black America. From the parking lot to the pews, many young adults are struggling to keep their head above water. Unemployment, student loan debt, broken homes, and frail relationships are the realities for many. The road that many young adults travel is not easy. As jobs leave communities and “corporate America” begins to resemble a country club, the temptation to take the shortcut and cut out the Church is more enticing than ever before.

On the other hand, some young adults have stayed on the straight and narrow by making the essential decisions needed to further their education in addition to securing the resources to provide for their family. They have also decided to stay with the Church.

Young Adult Sunday is a relatively new experience in the Black Church. In most congregations we celebrate men, women, youth, specific auxiliaries, missions, and monumental moments, but Young Adult Sunday is something that is only lifted once or twice within a calendar year. Congregational worship that highlights a specific ministry also tells the history and emphases of a church. For example, Mission Sunday is the Sunday in which the work that the church has done in the community whether near or far is celebrated while also inspiring the church to support the future mission work of the church. Young Adults are important to the vitality of the Church because this group of members typically represents the most talented and energetic members of a congregation. Their style of worship, song selections, and expressions can seem foreign to some within the congregation. However, it is important to remember that young adults either are or have the potential to become the new families and leaders of the church.

The lection scripture for this Young Adult Sunday shines light on a letter written to the church of Corinth. In today's scripture, we are reminded that many men and women of God have experienced temptations and found strength in God to overcome their temptations. This Scripture gives hope that no matter the measure of the temptation, God will make a way of escape for those who are tempted. The temptations of today can be discovered if we but take a look at the reasons for the failures of humanity in the past. Lust of the flesh, pride, and unpreparedness for life due to a lack of faithfulness to the ways and Word of God, are the root of many of today's issues and problems. In the midst of discovering their identity in God, while on this journey called life, temptations can come as a means to set young adults back or totally derail their journey.

Even though there are few highlighted stories on the news and social media that lift Godly integrity as a virtue to always seek, there are young adults who are able to secure good-paying jobs along with other blessings of life without drinking from the cup of worldly wine. In the midst of an inconstant government, a frail economy, and an African American community with a myriad of horrific problems, Young Adult Sunday is important to use as a time to encourage and celebrate those who are making a difference and sticking with God and the Church. This is also important because of the mounting scandals that have plagued the African American Church in recent years that have either sent young adults running for the doors or left them confused and disheartened about the Church. Finally, the failure of the current African American church to focus on issues that matter to young adults (the economy, college, child-rearing, violence, social activism, etc.) is also a reason for the decline in young adult attendance in many African American churches.

II. Young Adults Today

I believe that the temptation to stay away from the church on Sunday and other days during the week is more prevalent than ever before for young adults. For example, in Chicago in the spring and summer months you can find between 250–500 young adults playing flag football in a league that has grown by leaps and bounds. The co-ed flag football league is filled with professionals and other young adult leaders in Chicago. When surveying those who participated in the football league, the reoccurring reason for football over church was simply, “Church is

filled with too many fake people.” This statement from Christian Piatt opens the window wider to reasons why young adults do not attend church. Piatt is an author, editor, speaker, musician, and spoken word artist. He co-founded Milagro Christian Church in Pueblo, Colorado, with his wife, Rev. Amy Piatt, in 2004. He is the creator and editor of “Banned Questions About The Bible” and “Banned Questions About Jesus.”

Although the hypocrisy of the church is one reason young adults choose football over church, there are obviously more significant reasons, since young adults still go to their jobs even when they have fake colleagues. Here are seven other reasons that Piatt offers:

We’ve Been Hurt. I can include myself in this category. Sometimes the hurtful act is specific, such as when my youth leader threw a Bible at me for asking the wrong questions. Sometimes it’s rhetorical, either from the pulpit, in a small group study, or a congregational gathering. Sometimes it’s physical, taking the form of sexual abuse or the like. But millions claim a wound they can trace back to church that has never healed. Why? In part, because the church rarely seeks forgiveness.

Adult Life/College and Church Don’t Seem to Mix. There are the obvious things, like scheduling activities on Sunday mornings (hint: young people tend to go out on Saturday nights), but there’s more to it. In college, and before that by our parents, we’re taught to explore the world, broaden our horizons, think critically, question everything and figure out who we are as individuals. Though there’s value in this, it’s hyper-individualistic. But Church is more about community. In many ways, it represents, fairly or not, sameness, conformity, and a “check your brain at the door” ethos. This stands in opposition to what the world is telling us is important at this time in life. Perhaps an emphasis on a year of community service after high school would be a natural bridge to ameliorate some of this narcissism we’re building in to ourselves.

There’s No Natural Bridge to Church. Most teenagers leave home, either for college, to travel, work, or whatever after high school. With the bad economy, this number is fewer, but it’s a general trend. But the existing model of church still depends on the assumption that communities are relatively static, and that the church is at the center of that community. Not so anymore. When I went to college, I was contacted by fraternities, campus activity groups, and credit card companies, but not one church. The only connection I had with religion was the ridiculous guy who (literally) stood on a box with a bullhorn in the union garden and yelled at us about our sinful ways. I could have used support in how to deal with my own finances for the first time. I could have used a built-in network of friends. I would have loved a care package, an invitation for free pizza at the local restaurant, or help with laundry. What I got was the goof with the bullhorn.

We’re Distracted. I shared a video by Diana Butler Bass in a recent post about a priest who took his Ash Wednesday service out onto the street. When people saw him, they reacted as if they had been shaken out of a deep sleep. “It’s Ash Wednesday!” they said with surprise as they asked for the ashes. “Lent is starting!” It simply wasn’t on their radar. It’s not that we don’t care; we have so many things competing for our limited time and attention that the passive things that don’t

offer an immediate “interrupt” get relegated to the “later” pile. And we rarely ever get to the “later” pile, which leads me to the next point.

We’re Skeptical. We’re exposed to more ad impressions in a month today than any other previous generation experienced in a lifetime. I’m sitting in a hotel room writing this, and in this room, I see more than a dozen marketing messages. If I turn on the TV, they’re there. Pick up my phone, they’re there. Online . . . you get the point. So whereas generations before us expended energy seeking information, now it comes at us in such overwhelming volumes that we spend at least the same amount of energy filtering things out. This can lead to information overload and/or to skepticism, assuming that whoever is trying to get your attention wants something, just like everyone else.

We’re Exhausted. Generation X is also known as the Slacker Generation. This implies, of course, that we’re lazy and unmotivated. But consider how many of us go to college compared to generations before us. And consider that the baseline standard for family economics requires either a six-figure income or a two-income revenue stream to be middle class. Debt and living on credit are givens, and working full-time while also trying to maintain a marriage, rear kids, have friends and—God forbid—have some time left for ourselves leaves us with less than nothing. We’re always running at a deficit. So when you ask me to set aside more time and more money for church, you’re trying to tap already empty reserves.

I Don’t Get It. Young adults today are the most un-churched generation in a long time. In many cases, it’s not that we’re walking away from Church; we never went in. From what I can tell from the outside, there’s not much relevance to my life in there, and I’m not about to take the risk of walking through the door to find out otherwise.¹

And an additional reason that I as the author of this unit offer:

The struggle to better oneself is hard for young adults. College, which is an option for some, and a hope for others, is leaving many young adults with a financial burden they cannot carry. According to CNN Money, two-thirds of the class of 2011 held student loans upon graduation, and the average borrower owed \$26,600, according to a report from the Institute for College Access & Success’ Project on Student Debt. That’s up 5% from 2010 and is the highest level of debt in the seven years the report has been published.²

The increase comes at a time when unemployment has remained stubbornly high for college graduates—it was at 8.8% for 2011. Those without a college degree are more than twice as likely to end up without jobs, however. The unemployment rate for recent high school graduates was 19.1% in 2011. Many students in the class of 2011 also entered college right before the recession hit, with many families suddenly finding themselves unable to afford the tuition payments. At the same time, many public colleges have hiked tuition significantly in response to state budget cuts, while private colleges have also increased tuition.

For those who cannot attend college, finding a job is even more difficult. When we examine the unemployment rates for blacks in America, even as the total unemployment rate decreases the

unemployment rate for blacks has increased.³ In our poorest communities we are witnessing jobs moving out, and drugs and violence are moving in. For the young adult who is simply trying to make an honest living, based on the economic conditions in this country the temptation to take the shortcut is becoming more and more enticing.

Young Adult Sunday for some young adults is a reminder to keep their head above water, and not to drown in the ways of the world. Given all that young adults have to deal with, if the Church wants to keep them involved, now is the time for the church to make room for young adults and to do so in meaningful ways. Young Adult Sunday should remind young adults that they are valuable in the eyes of God, and in the eyes of the Black Church.

III. Testimony

There was a young boy who started his life journey in the Windy City called Chicago. Growing up on the Southside of Chicago, this young boy shared a home with an older brother and sister. This family did not have much, but they had what they needed to survive. This young man's parents would remind their children that they were "middle class poor." This young boy came to understand that the definition of "middle class poor" was simply one paycheck away from losing everything his family owned. Throughout his childhood, his parents would sacrifice, work hard, and pray for a better day. As a child, he ate mustard sandwiches and slept with his coat on under the covers during the winter months. This young man's dad was robbing Peter to pay Paul, and his mother was trying to make a dollar out of fifteen cents. The struggles they endured as a family brought them close together. When his parents decided to divorce, he thought that he would go from "middle class poor" to the poor house; however, the grace of God kept the lights on, food on the table, and clothes on his back.

Living in those conditions growing up motivated him to work hard in the classroom and figure out a way to use his gifts to make an honest living. The first job this young man had was cutting grass. Every Tuesday he would cut his grandparent's lawn, and he would cut his neighbor's lawn as well. Beginning in April and ending in late September, he made close to \$20 dollars a week. As an eleven-year-old with a little change in his pocket, you could not tell him anything. As he grew older, the drive to make it out of the ghetto led him down Temptation Street.

On the brink of high school graduation and a life plan that was not clear, the fast life seemed to be the life for him. From sunup to sundown, he spent most of his days chasing things that filled his pockets but left his soul empty. The best way to describe his teenage and early adult years was a boxing match that temptation was winning round by round. What he thought he needed in order to have a good life were the very things that were destroying his life. Dealing with pressure from a father who wanted to see productivity, and looking in the mirror and seeing the reflection of a lost man, he began to fold like a deck of cards. This was made even more difficult by having to address addiction that was a major part of his family scenario.

On the evening of September 11, 2002, while sitting in a room, he professed his faith in God, sought forgiveness from God, and started a new journey in life. That young man who grew up on the Southside of Chicago was me. The new journey I have taken with God has been filled with

really low lows and really high highs. It has been God who has kept me balanced, motivated, ethical, and energized.

IV. Illustrations

Two Brothers

On Christmas day, two brothers received a football game from their grandmother to play on their game console. All night these two brothers played their video game, and the younger brother was upset that the older brother was always winning. No matter the team the younger brother selected, his brother always found a way to win. At the end of one game, the older brother decided to go and get some pie from the kitchen.

While in the kitchen, the younger brother decided to pull out his gaming magazine to find a cheat code he could use to beat his brother. Once they started playing again the older brother noticed he started to lose, because his brother was somehow able to score every time he had the football. During halftime, the young brother went to the bathroom, and while he was in the bathroom his brother found the book that had the cheat code.

In order to make the game fair, the older brother decided to deactivate the cheat code. At the start of the second half, the young brother noticed that he was no longer able to score, and he eventually lost the game. At the end of the game, the older brother looked at his little brother and said, "If you would have never given in to your temptation to cheat, I would have showed you how to win."

Temptation only makes you wait longer for victory.

Almost Had It

There was an amateur golfer who had the skills and potential to become a successful professional golfer. In order to become a professional golfer, this promising amateur had to win the final qualifying tournament. The golfer was paired in a group with three other golfers who had failed to qualify five years in a row. Prior to the start of the tournament this group of golfers decided that they would do whatever they could to make sure they qualified, even if it meant cheating. After the score cards were counted, this young promising golfer was one shot short of becoming a professional.

Before he left the club house, a reporter asked him a question, "How do you feel after you have come up one shot short?" The golfer responded, "It is better for me to miss by one than to not try at all." As he took his long walk from the locker room to his car, a tournament official came up to the golfer and said, "Congratulations pro, you are now officially a professional golfer." The golfer looked at the official with a puzzled face and said to him, "I missed qualifying by one shot." The official responded, "Yes, you missed it by one, but the others were disqualified so you made it by one."

Never let desperation cause you to give in to the temptation to cheat.

V. Young Adult Sunday Worship Suggestions

As you plan Young Adult Sunday, it is important to remember that Young Adult Sunday should be planned and led by young adults. Here are suggestions to consider when planning the worship experience:

- Establish a worship committee that has one lead coordinator and consists of the following teams that correspond with the lead coordinator: arts and music team, social media team, marketing and publication team, and fellowship team.
- The purpose of the worship committee is to seek God for clarity on ways to minister to young adults and others in the congregation. The worship committee should provide speaker recommendations to the pastor.
- The fellowship team should plan a meal and fellowship after service.
- The social media team should advertise this Sunday two months in advance.
- Ask each young adult to bring two young adult friends.
- Young Adult Sunday should be a dress-down Sunday.
- Plan follow-up events to continue ministry with young adults who attend your Young Adult Sunday. Be sure to get contact information—especially get cell numbers—for all who attend who are not members of your church.

VI. Song Selections for Young Adult Sunday

“All about You” by Anita Wilson is a song that reminds everyone that it’s all about God. This upbeat call-and-response song is a great opening song for the congregation to get on one accord for this service.

All about You

by Anita Wilson

(Verse 1)

I see the sun rise over the horizon and I’m grateful (for another day)
Because of Your love I can face any challenge that comes my way
Only in You I live, I move and I have my being (totally)
I surrender my will to Yours; Make me who I am in You ohhh

(Pre-Chorus)

In Christ I can do all things; really doesn't matter if
the enemy tries to harm me 'cause no weapon formed will be able to prosper
I will let my light so shine so everyone can see not me but He
Who started a good work in me, He shall complete it, Yeah, Yeah

(Chorus)

(Ohh) I will pursue what pleases You I will follow through
'cause I realize it's all about You You You You
I will pursue what pleases You do what You tell me to
'cause I realize it's all about You You You

(Verse 2)

Ohh I tried to find my own way through this maze
Thought I could make it to my place of destiny
(But then I thought as You) stood naked in humility
Now I clearly see without You there's no me

(Pre-Chorus)

(Chorus)

(Repeat Chorus)

(Pre-chorus)

Vamp:

It's all about You
It's all about You
It's all about You
About You, About You

(Repeat 5x)⁴

“He's Able” by Darwin Hobbs is an uplifting song to remind young adults that God is well able to provide, regardless of any need or situation that is present in their life.

He's Able

by Darwin Hobbs

Leader:

Exceedingly, abundantly, above all, all you could ask or think according to, the power, that
worketh in you
God is able to do just what he said he would do
He's gonna fulfill every promise to you
Don't give up on God cause He won't give up on you

He's Able, yeah, He's able

Chorus (2x):

God is able to do just what He said He would do
He's gonna fulfill every promise to you
Don't give up on God cause He won't give up on you
He's Able (2x)

Leader:

Oh, oh oh oh, oh oh oh
He's Able

Bridge (3x):

Oh, oh oh oh, oh oh oh
He's Able

Vamp:

He's Able

Leader:

Don't give up on God cause He won't give up on you
He's able⁵

“Turning around for Me” by VaShawn Mitchell has a slower tempo and can be used as a worship or sermonic selection. This song reminds those who are listening that God is well able to intervene and change any situation no matter how bleak it is.

Turning around for Me

by VaShawn Mitchell

Sometimes discouraged but not defeated.
Cast down but not destroyed
There're times I don't understand
But I believe it's turning around for me.

I've had struggles and disappointments
There were times I felt so alone
Some of my friends they let me down
But I still believe, it's turning around for me.

Around for me
Around for me
Around for me
It's turning around for me

Cause I can see the breaking...
I can see the breaking of day
God is making a way
A change is coming for me
If I stand strong and believe
There's no reason to doubt
I know He's working it out
It's turning around for me

It won't always be like this
The Lord will perfect that concerning me
And sooner or later, turn in my favor

Sooner or later, turn in my favor (Repeat 2 times)
It's turning around for me (Repeat 2 times)

Around for me (Repeat 3times)
It's turning around for me (Repeat 4 times)
Turning around for me (repeat 8 times)
It's turning around for me.⁶

Conclusion

Young adults are important to the vitality of the Church now and in the future. Congregations must find ways to make space to seek, celebrate, and nurture young adults. Young adults must realize the priceless wisdom that rest in the souls of those who have lived longer and offer them guidance if they give the Church a chance or a second chance.

Notes

1. Piatt, Christian. "Seven Reasons Why Young Adults Quit Church." 13 March 2012. Online location: [http://www.huffingtonpost.com/christian-piatt/seven-reasons-why-young-a b 1338159.html](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/christian-piatt/seven-reasons-why-young-a-b-1338159.html) (accessed 3 March 2013).
2. Blake, Ellis. "Average student loan debt nears \$27,000." 18 October 2012. Online location: <http://money.cnn.com/2012/10/18/pf/college/student-loan-debt/index.html> (accessed 3 March 2013).
3. Rivas, Jorge. "Jobs Report Still Bleak for Black Workers Under 30." 1 February 2013. http://colorlines.com/archives/2013/02/jobs_report_still_bleak_for_black_workers_under_30.html (accessed 3 March 2013).
4. "All About You." By Anita Wilson. Robinson, Rick and Anita Wilson. Worship Soul. Brentwood, TN: EMI, 2012.

5. "He's Able." By Darwin Hobbs. Haddon, Deitrick. Free. Indianapolis, IN: Tyscot, 2008.
6. "Turning around for Me." By VaShawn Mitchell. Created 4 This. Brentwood, TN: EMI, 2012.