



Date: July 24, 2016

Title: "Hope, Part 3: Growing Old and Staying Green

Scripture: Psalm 92:12-15

Description: How to stay fresh and green in old age.

Some said Joshua Slocum was the greatest sailing captain alive. He was renowned for his skills, courage, and integrity, so that owners of commercial sailing ships vied for his services. Then, as he was reaching the peak of his career, steam ships were invented. Overnight, Joshua Slocum became outdated, useless. After a few years, when they were clearly obsolete, someone gave him a wooden sailing vessel, which he named "The Spray." It was so rotted that Slocum cut timber himself to replace almost every strut and planking on the boat. Then, in 1895 he set sail from Boston to sail around the world alone. He returned three years later, the first to solo circumnavigate the globe. His book, *Sailing Alone Around the World*, became an instant classic. Joshua Slocum was 51 years old when he began this adventure. The preacher who told me Slocum's story was in his late 30's, and was quite impressed that someone as old as age 51 could do anything! Still, in 1895, fifty-one was considered very old.

This morning I am completing a three-sermon series on hope. I want to consider one subject that is greatly feared in our culture, and present a ground for hope in that area. I'm talking about growing old.

I've never lied about my age. I have no trouble saying "I'm seventy-three" loud and clear. If I'm so cool with my age, why don't I like being called "sir" at the gym, as in "Would you like to play a game of racquetball, *sir*?" Why doesn't "You look great for your age!" feel like a compliment? I want to respond cheerfully, "Thanks. You look great for your age, too!"

Life changes as you get older. Here's how: you get into things that are important and have a chance to lose the things that aren't. Here are a few lies you should know: *wrinkles are ugly*. Only because we're taught they are ugly. *Old people are incompetent*. Not true. *It's sad to be old*. False. Google-search "U curve of happiness" and you'll find that people are happiest in the beginnings and at the ends of their lives. Although the Bible didn't have Google, scripture knew that centuries ago: Psalm 92: "...They will still bear fruit in old age. They will stay fresh and green."

How old are you going to be when you set out on your great adventure? Sue Oldham was 61 years old when she swam the English Channel, making her the oldest woman to ever accomplish this feat. She was rather disappointed when someone broke her record the next year, so she swam it again, this time at age 64. When does the real adventure begin? When do you expect to reach your peak?

Frank Lloyd Wright tried to create a seamless connection between buildings and the nature that surrounded them. America's greatest architect, Frank Lloyd Wright did his best work after the age of 70.

John and Polly Lewis live in Decatur, Georgia. Their work was featured on a national news report. (To see the report, go to www.youtube.com. Search "John and Polly Lewis". The report will be the first result.) John Lewis is 89; Polly is 83. Do you think, "When I'm in my 80's, that's when I'm going to be at my best in the parenting game!"

When do you reach your peak? Most folks agree a life looks something like a normal curve. Somewhere in the middle, we reach our peak; after that, it's all downhill. Where do you think the phrase "Over the hill" came from?

That's the world's view, the one we're sold every day. The only way to combat the curve is to stay young: fight those wrinkles! Replace that hair loss! Tuck that tummy! The Bible offers a different view: "So we do not lose heart. Even though our outer nature is wasting away, our inner nature is being renewed day by day." (2 Corinthians 4:16) (This information may not be vital to the sermon, but I cannot resist telling you. The Greek word for "lose heart" is "kaka". "We do not lose heart." No "kaka" here!) There are two Greek words for "new". "Neos" means "new in time". Like a carton of milk with an expiration date. "kanos" means "new in relation to the activity of God." "The steadfast love of the Lord never ceases. His mercies never end. they are new every morning." (Lamentations 3:23) God's love, which never ends, is also "kanos", new every morning.

So are God's people. Psalm 92: "They will still bear fruit in old age. They will stay 'kanos'. They will stay fresh and green." The world says you reach a certain point and then fade into irrelevance. God's word says you stay fresh and green. Though your outward nature is wasting away, you stay kanos. Whatever our age, we need the lives of those who are old, yet new every morning. You been married for a long time and still like each other? We need to see you holding hands in church. You grew up in the Depression? We need to hear about how that was done, because we may be having hard times ourselves now.

Nine Inch Nails musician, Trent Reznor, wrote a song in his early 20's, titled "Hurt." Nothing much came of the song until Johnny Cash discovered it and recorded it. Listen to Cash's version. (It can be found on www.youtube.com. Search for "Johnny Cash Hurt")

Can a 20 year old sing that song? He made this video a few months before his wife, June Carter Cash died. It was the last recording Johnny Cash made. When Trent Reznor heard Cash's recording, he said, "That song isn't mine anymore."

There is a wisdom gained from being 70 years old that a 20 year old cannot possibly have. We need the aliveness and energy of the young; we also need the wisdom of the elders. Anyone over 70 should be declared a national treasure. In the novel, "White Death", Clive Cussler tells of a village elder. The elder is the font of wisdom for the tribe. At one point he speaks to a young westerner who has come to "save" the village: "I have survived seven decades of witchcraft, politics, flood, droughts, military coups, famines, tribal wars, failed crops, court cases, fines, squabbling with relatives, dysentery, falls from palm trees, riots, taxes, tainted water, corrupt chiefs, poverty, thieves, deadly plagues, driver ants, yellow fever,

government inspections, white mining speculators, intestinal parasites, the British, snake bites, chronic malaria, and bush devils. What have you done?" There is a kind of wisdom you get only by living through the years. We need the aliveness and energy of the young. In God's community, we need each other.

Psalm 1 describes it: "They shall be like a tree, planted by living water..." An old tree survives because it has two things: it has really deep roots and it has a flexibility. Young people blessed with older friends tap into roots that go very deep; old people with young friends maintain a flexibility that keeps them fresh. Society's view of old age being "over the hill" is deadly for wisdom-sharing. It removes the generations from the treasures they have for each other.

"They will still bear fruit in old age, they will stay fresh and green, proclaiming, "The LORD is upright; he is my Rock." (Psalm 42:14-15) How do you stay "fresh and green" as you get older? I can't give you the step-by-step plan, but I can show you what it looks like. (see video at www.youtube.com. search "tc bank team rangers" – view first result.)

With an old-person friend, we get to see a life in which "more" isn't the goal. A life that is content with what is, not driven by what's next. "The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want..." (Psalm 23:1) implies an outlook not driven by the desire for more. Old age is designed for reflection, not achievement. Bodies are slower; there is less responsibility to manage. There is time to think and feel about living a life rather than strive to make a living.

A fresh and green old person accepts the limits of being old and finds joy in smaller boundaries. In her prime she may have been head of the philosophy department of the university, directing the education of hundreds of students. Now she teaches a dozen kids in a fifth grade Sunday School Class. She is amazed at the enormous satisfaction this brings her.

An old person who possesses wisdom reflects a life that has rebounded after crushing losses. See Johnny Cash singing "Hurt". "You who have made me see many troubles and calamities will revive me again; from the depths of the earth you will bring me up again." (Psalm 71:20)

If you are old, please listen carefully: We do not need your advice; we do not want your instructions or your political opinions. We need *you*. It isn't what you know, it's who you have become that is so valuable.

We have people in this room who have been married longer than lots of people who have been alive. We have young couples trying to decide, a year into marriage, whether they are going to make it. Those young couples desperately need what you have. We have a mom whose child is in jail. A family whose child is sick and does not improve. A couple who have had an affair and want to try to keep their marriage together. A man who has moved here a year ago because he found work here, but his family is back "home" where the house won't sell. Are there other people in this very room who have faced anything like those situations? Most of them are people we would call "old."

We will not allow you to become invisible. We will not put you out to pasture and ignore you. All we ask of you is this: although your outward nature grows weak, inwardly be renewed every day. Stay fresh and green.

This is our hope for you. Because if we so you stay fresh and green, we can have hope that God will bless us in the same way as we grow old.

Amen.