

Sharing the Gospel with Older Adults

"I've been asked to lead devotions for the seniors that meet in our church. I've never done that before. It is scary, suppose I do it wrong? Do you have any suggestions?" In my role as Director of Spiritual Life for our United Methodist Homes, I have been amazed at how many phone calls I get from frantic church members asking this and similar questions.

When offered the opportunity to witness to older adults, either in a formal or informal setting, where do we begin? If that isn't our question, it ought to be! Witnessing, preaching, sharing our faith, is not something to be done lightly. I think of the numerous times I've been present when such an event took place, and how often I have shuddered at the trivializing of the Gospel that passed for devotion and worship. How often such a time seems to offer banal comments about the afterlife, glib observations about dealing with problems faced by the aging (moving to a new home, death of spouse, death of friends, for example)! How often such a time, such an opportunity, is met with a poem, a reading about the beauty of nature, rather than a call to commit anew to the challenge and joy of living out the gospel in every circumstance of our lives.

Older adults are no different than anyone else in this regard. We all need to know that Christian living is about becoming, about growing, about reflecting the love of God! We all need to be challenged! We all need to be hearing the truth that while we have breath, we have a purpose to live out! How often I have found myself saying to one of our residents in Wesley Village, "What are you doing with the rest of your life? Are you going to let that wheelchair or that walker, or your infirmity stop you from living as if you know God still loves you and still has a purpose for you?"

When our devotions, our worship does not challenge the older adult, it misses the gospel message that every life is valuable, every life is worth living, every life has something to offer to the world. Unless cognitively unable, every adult can still follow Jesus' mandate to be of service. Every older adult can still be a caring friend to someone in need, can still speak to a lonely neighbor, can still listen to someone else's story. Not to challenge them to become all they can is to suggest that they are no longer needed or valuable, certainly not the message we want to deliver or to which Christians bear witness.

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Yes, I do! Follow the lead of Jesus, remember that all people are called with three simple words, 'Come, follow me!' Plan accordingly and you'll be on the right track.

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