

I remember the first memorial service I did as a Unitarian minister. It was for a man I never met. I was told that his family were dedicated church members since the 1950's, and since the other ministers were out of town, I would be the one meeting with his family to plan a service. The only thing I was told about him was: "Remember, he was part of the greatest generation."

The term seemed familiar, but I didn't know what it meant. It was a term made popular in Tom Brokaw's bestseller *The Greatest Generation*, a generation born in the 1920's that endured the Great Depression, fought in World War II, and built institutions which would usher in economic prosperity. It was a generation characterized as one that "gave much, and asked for little."

As I sat with his daughter and his wife, and heard stories about this man's life, I was moved. I was introduced not just to a man, but a generation I didn't know much about. I didn't have a personal connection up until that point with people who endured and lived with dignity in a time of both great difficulty and great possibility.

I understood through hearing stories of this man's life, that difficulties are only bearable to the extent there are possibilities. The difficulties are put in context of the possibilities that ushered forth. This doesn't diminish difficulty, but puts them into a larger narrative.

I also learned that in comparison, we are pretty harsh on the generations that follow. There is a lot of judgement about baby boomers, Generation X, millennials, even Gen Y. If you don't know what most of these generations are, don't worry. I'm on the fence about whether it really matters.

In many ways, the generations that follow seem to mirror each other in perplexing ways. For instance, I bet most baby boomers are more tech savvy than I am. Gen X is probably more fashionable, more in touch with news and trends. I'm pretty certain that Gen Y, the generation that comes after me is already smarter than I'll ever be. When I meet people of my own generation, I'm just as surprised and perplexed.

I've been told more than once that perhaps I'm a throwback to a different generation. If I was forced to say which one, I'd probably reply with assurance: the greatest one.

I would love to see a book written about each generation called "the greatest generation," because I think what we need most badly at this time in history is not sharp criticism and generational divides, but a sense of aspiration. Yes, a sense of greatness.

There is a rightful place for honest self assessment, and criticism. And there is also a rightful place for vision, for a perspective of greatness that will not only influence our lives but future generations. It will be up to us to define what that greatness is.

And this greatness in my opinion, is multigenerational. It doesn't belong to any one group of people based on a birth date. Each of us in our own way have had to contest with tragedies and changes too great for the mind to fathom:

World War II and the reality of concentration camps, civil disobedience and bloodshed, mass consumerism and technology boom, 9/11, school shootings. Each of these great tragedies have left a mark on us, and have marked each generation in personal and particular ways. These events have marked the mind and heart of each generation differently, some quite profoundly, but it has also touched all of us.

A generation is not great because of what happened to it. It's not great because certain tragedies happened or didn't happen. A generation only becomes great through its response to world events.

I think this is a great challenge to us in the age we are in. All of us. I think it will be a challenge for us to gain some sense of clarity and imagination in a time of media saturation and commentary. It will be a challenge not to live our lives just through technology, television, and narrow political ideologies. It will be a challenge for us to face our future without resorting to the safety of numbness or despair.

It will be a challenge to look at our future with skeptical realism without diminishing our humanity in the process. This is perhaps the greatest challenge we've ever seen. Which means we are primed to be the greatest generation.

Our church is a trust of multi-generational wisdom. Some members have been here for 50 years or more. They are the bedrock of this institution. Never forget that. They have seen and understand more than any minister ever will. They offer all of us encouragement to stay steady through great change, to not get overly excited and lose our bearings. They teach us what stewardship really means, and what it means see beyond our own interests. This is a place of great possibility. We have in this congregation the World War II generation, baby boomers, Generation X, millennials, and Gen Y. We are facing today as a multigenerational community. Working together, learning from each other, playing together, being amused and perplexed by one another - Together: we are creating the greatest generation.