

Space: the final frontier.

*These are the voyages of the starship Enterprise. Its continuing mission:  
to explore strange new worlds,  
to seek out new life and new civilizations,  
to boldly go where no one has gone before.*

---

**“Faith: The Final Frontier” ~ To Explore Strange New Worlds**

---

How many “Trekkies” are here? How many of you could recite that opening monologue from memory?

Today I’m beginning a series of sermons entitled, “Faith: the Final Frontier”. The church has been in decline since the late 1950s; and nothing has slowed that trend. Some say the church is dying; but, I believe the church is standing at the borders of a great frontier—full of potential and promise. And I believe God is calling us “To Explore Strange New Worlds.”

How many of you were born after Neil Armstrong walked on the moon? (How many don’t know when that happened? How many don’t know who Neil Armstrong was?) On July 21, 1969, he became the first man to walk on the moon. How many of you were born *after* that date? How many of you watched it on television?

Of those who watched it on TV, how many grew up in a home without a TV? How many of you now have a computer—on line? How many don’t remember home without a computer?

For the first time in human history six generations are alive and interacting. Each generation has its character-forming, value-forming event: The Depression, World War II, Vietnam, a walk on the moon, etc. These events act as filters—they become the “glass” through which each generation “sees dimly”.

Brian Feille, who teaches at Brite Divinity School, has a unique perspective on generational theory. His own family spans four generations. His father’s first wife died, and he had more children through his second wife. The oldest brother and youngest half-sister were born 25 years apart.

Brian’s father is from the “GI Generation”—the one Tom Brokaw calls “The Greatest Generation”. He was abandoned as a boy—passed from home to home—lived through the Depression. In World War II he was stabbed in a foxhole, carried out on a stretcher. A mortar round exploded nearby, killing one of the men carrying him. The other man carried him out piggyback. For him, symbols like the flag represent a time when he was involved in, and almost died for, a cause bigger than himself. That had an impact on him. It formed his values and his character.

In his mental universe you work like crazy, save like crazy; don’t spend money because you might *have* a rainy day—another depression—and you want your chil-

dren to have the opportunities you never had. And part of what makes for self-respect is to save, save, save, and never be dependent on anybody for anything.

And so along comes Brian and his brothers and sisters, and it was *expected* they'd go to college. It was *expected* they'd have it better than their parents, so they developed a sense of *entitlement*—they were *entitled* to more and better. Where their parents' generation lived by an ethic of self-sacrifice, they lived by an ethic of self-fulfillment. Their parents valued hard work and saving; they value leisure time and high tech toys. Their parents took pride in *producing* the best; they made every effort to "*have*" the best.

Brian's was the first generation of TV kids—called "consumer trainees": they could hum TV commercial jingles before they could sing "Jesus Loves Me" or "The Star Spangled Banner." And what events most impacted their lives? Vietnam, Kent State, Watergate, the assassinations of JFK, RFK, MLK, Jr...

Brian's youngest half-brother is from generation "X". Another "Gen-Xer" wrote in a book entitled *A Generation Alone*, "We were born in the Nixon era and have never known national trust in leadership. In fact, we have seen corrupt leadership ever since: in everything from PTL ministries to the LAPD."<sup>1</sup>

Imagine Thanksgiving Dinner conversation in Brian's family. Oldest brother was a Marine—a Vietnam hero; *The American Rifleman* did a cover story about him—how he'd killed his first deer when he was ten; killed 70 men in one day in Vietnam; returned home wounded, but recovered in time for opening day of deer season. The youngest half-brother—a conscientious objector—called him a murderer.

A battle of bumper stickers raged in that family. Dad gave Little Brother one with an American flag. It said, "America, Love It or Leave It". Little brother countered with one, also with an American flag. It said, "America: Change It or Lose It." Dad gave him a bumper sticker with the peace symbol on it. It said, "Footprint of the American Chicken"; Little Brother retaliated with one that said, "Old Soldiers Never Die. Young Ones Do."

Brian was in seminary when he heard about the Kent State Massacre. He was devastated—couldn't eat or sleep; went home and his father's first words were "My only regret is that the National Guardsmen were such lousy shots."<sup>2</sup>

Things change: one generation to another; even in the same family. How do we minister in times like these? How do we even know what issues to address?

In Boy Scouts we camped out once a month, year-around. I remember one trip in late fall: we were putting up tents— those big, heavy, canvas eight-man

---

<sup>1</sup> William Mahedy & Janet Bernardi, *A Generation Alone* (Downers Grove, Illinois: InterVarsity Press, 1994), p. 18

<sup>2</sup> Brian Feille, "Pitching Tent in a Shifting Wind," taped address delivered to the Association of Disciples Musicians meeting at William Jewell College, Liberty, Missouri, in July, 1998.

tents. It took six of us to set it up if the wind *wasn't* blowing; but the wind was blowing hard out of the south. We were having trouble!

Finally, an adult showed us how to work *with* the wind and let it *help* us. First, we staked down the south side of the tent, and then raised the center poles. The wind actually held the tent upright, and we went around to stake down the north side. But, before we could finish, one of those Texas "blue northers" came roaring down out of the panhandle, the wind shifted hard, and it all went flying!

Life and ministry today has become a lot like trying to "pitch tent" in a shifting wind. We face a "Strange New World" How do we minister in times like these? How do we even know what issues to address? And how did we get here?

Which brings us to our text for today:

<p>EXODUS 3:1-7, 10-12 (NRSV) <i>Moses was keeping the flock of his father-in-law Jethro, the priest of Midian; he led his flock beyond the wilderness, and came to Horeb, the mountain of God. <sup>2</sup>There the angel of the LORD appeared to him in a flame of fire out of a bush; he looked, and the bush was blazing, yet it was not consumed. <sup>3</sup>Then Moses said, "I must turn aside and look at this great sight, and see why the bush is not burned up." <sup>4</sup>When the LORD saw that he had turned aside to see, God called to him out of the bush, "Moses, Moses!" And he said, "Here I am." <sup>5</sup>Then he said, "Come no closer! Remove the sandals from your feet, for the place on which you are standing is holy ground." <sup>6</sup>He said further, "I am the God of</i></p>	<p><i>your father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob." And Moses hid his face, for he was afraid to look at God. <sup>7</sup>Then the LORD said, "I have observed the misery of my people who are in Egypt; I have heard their cry on account of their taskmasters. Indeed, I know their sufferings ... <sup>10</sup>So come, I will send you to Pharaoh to bring my people, the Israelites, out of Egypt." <sup>11</sup>But Moses said to God, "Who am I that I should go to Pharaoh, and bring the Israelites out of Egypt?" <sup>12</sup>He said, "I will be with you; and this shall be the sign for you that it is I who sent you: when you have brought the people out of Egypt, you shall worship God on this mountain."</i></p>
--	--

Talk about your "Strange New World!" A bush that talks while it burns—and isn't even scorched! Moses didn't want to go. He didn't know those people, except as slaves. He'd grown up in Pharaoh's palace. Besides, some Post Offices back in Egypt still had his picture on the wall. And he didn't know this God who speaks from burning bushes.

So he made excuses: "I talk funny. People laugh at me when I talk. They won't listen to me. They don't know you; I don't even know you!

But God answered with five words. That's all Moses needed; it's all we need:

"I Will Be With You."

My purpose here with you is to lead you in the process of preparing to identify and call a new permanent Senior Minister, and to enter into effective ministry partnership with him or her. What I offer is dependent upon your response to three questions:

- Do you believe *God Still Speaks to God's people?*
- Do you believe we can hear and understand what *God* is saying to us?
- When we have discerned *God's* call to us, will you follow *God* into "Strange New Worlds"?