**Bigfoot, UFOs and Sticky Faith**

**FBC Albemarle**

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*The Legend of Bigfoot* was a film created by an animal tracker named Ivan Marx. He spent ten years of research in tracking what the Eskimos called “bushman,” and the Native Americans called “Sasquatch” but best known as Bigfoot. In an hour and a half long documentary, Marx showed footages of tracking Bigfoot far and wide around the country. Over the years, there have been stories of sighting of Bigfoot, a gigantic half man, half beast. However, there is no confirmation of such a being but that hasn’t stopped people from hunting Bigfoot!

For ages, humans have been fascinated with the idea that there might exist other living beings somewhere in the universe. Honestly, I would not be shocked if other life forms do exist. That would not change anything about what I believe about God, Jesus and his creation. Many in the world believe they have been eyewitnesses to unidentified flying objects in the sky. Matter of fact, you can go on the Internet and see thousands of websites dedicated to sightings of UFOs around the world with pictures. Some conspiracy theorists would tell you that our government already knows of other life forms in far galaxies that they are keeping from us!

Bigfoot and UFOs may or may not be figments of our imaginations. I will let you decide that for yourself. The point this morning is that sometimes Bigfoot and UFO sightings can be as rare as sightings of Millennials and post-Millennials in the church with growing and vibrant faith! I realize I am using a hyperbole but figuring out why Millennials have not been knocking down the doors of churches all over the country has been somewhat like hunting Bigfoot or seeing UFOs in the sky!

Let’s first define Millennials and post-Millennials. Millennials (Gen Y) are young adults who were born between 1982 and 2004. It is probably the most studied generation to date. In some sense, this generation has shown a split personality. According to sociologists William Strauss and Neil Howe, Millennials will become like the Greatest Generation with a strong sense of community both locally and globally. On the other hand, in her 2006 book, *Generation Me*, Jean Twenge refers to Millennials as the ME generation. She attributes Millennials with the traits of confidence and tolerance, but also a sense of entitlement and narcissism. Depending on what you might read and what you might have experienced with your personal interactions with Millennials, you might land on one side or the other.

Post-Millennials, sometimes known as the iGeneration, are the current children and young adolescents born since early 2000’s. This is the first generation to have Internet technology so readily available at a very young age. As technology became more compact and affordable and the popularity of smartphones exploded, over 40% of the iGeneration spends more than three hours a day on a computer device for entertainment. Obviously with 77% of 12-17 year olds owning a cellphone in 2015, technology has strongly influenced this generation in terms of communication and education. It is too early to attach any specific attributes to this generation but you can bet that technology will have a strong influence.

There is no disputing the fact that Millennials who grew up in church are leaving the church in droves. Many reports have agreed and anecdotal evidences are prevalent that this is the case. According to **Rainer Research, 70% of youth**, who were active in youth group, leave the church by the time they’re 22 years old. Based on the current rate of departure, **Barna estimates that 80%** of those raised in the church will be disengaged by the time they’re 29 years old. Youth Fuller Institute completed a longitudinal study that showed 40%-50% of all students who experience a vibrant faith in high school shelve their faith in college and beyond. Several other studies and surveys confirm the trend: Millennials (18-29 year olds), who were raised in the church, are leaving the church in droves.

Unfortunately, we don’t have the time to really discuss why Millennial Christians are walking away from church, sometimes never to come back. In the past, young people would leave the church, sow their wild oats and then come back to church when they get married and begin having kids. Statistics have shown that this just is not the case with the Millennials. So what do we do? How do we make sure that the doors of our church never shudder because we can’t afford to keep them open in the generations to come? How do we instill Sticky Faith in our children, youth and young adults that will last throughout their adulthood?

Before we start talking about how we develop a faith that will last, we first need to define what faith is. The writer of Hebrews defines faith as “being sure of what we hope for and certain of what we do not see.” (v. 1) Faith is believing that the future will be as God promised. Well, what does God promise? Just to name a few: God promises us rest when we are weary and heavy laden (Matt. 11:28-29); He gives power to the weak and strength to the powerless (Isaiah 40:29); God will supply all of our needs from his glorious riches (Phil. 4:19); God promises us that nothing can separate us from the love of Christ (Rom. 8:37-39); God promises us peace so do not let your hearts be troubled. (John 14:27); etc. So, faith is believing that God will fulfill all of these promises and more to us.

The writer of Hebrews also said that faith is being certain of what we do not see. We cannot be certain of what tomorrow will bring. However, we certainly have experiences in our past and experiences of fellow believers that remind us of God’s faithfulness and love. We do not have to place our faith in something that is nebulous. We can place our faith in a God who is at work in our lives and in our world. Therefore, even though we cannot see what tomorrow holds, we can still be certain that God will remain faithful and continue to love his creation.

In verse 6, the author reminds us that without faith, it is impossible to please God without loving and believing in him. Faith drives us to have the courage and strength to face whatever tomorrow might hold because God walks with us in our journey.

Therefore, if faith is being sure of what we hope for and certain of what we do not see, then what do we mean by “Sticky Faith?” How do we help people develop a faith that will stick for a lifetime? What does that even look like? The researchers of Fuller Youth Institute put some characteristics to what Sticky Faith looks like and acts like. It makes sense to know what we are looking for so that we will know when we find it!

First, Sticky Faith is both internal and external. Having Sticky Faith means that a person not only has a heart for God but that also translates into faithful actions. If we have a vibrant faith that is living and breathing with God, than what we think about and how we think about the world we live in becomes a natural part of who we are. As our faith increases, we learn to see the world through the lens of the cross of Jesus and believe that God’s kingdom will come on earth as it is in heaven in the end. Therefore, because of our internal thoughts and attitudes, our external actions will reflect our faith in who Christ truly is. These behaviors include regular attendance in church, consistent prayer and reading of the Bible, service to others in the church and in the community. It is important to note that this doesn’t follow the reflexive property: if a=b, then b=a. It only works when the external actions are caused by the internal change that has happened to the heart.

Second, Sticky Faith is both personal and communal. I believe every person has to make the choice to place their faith and trust in Jesus as their Lord and Savior. Salvation cannot be transferred through birth or through proximity. Just because the parents have faith does not mean that a child is guaranteed salvation. It is a choice that every man, woman and child must make for him or herself. However, Sticky Faith is also communal because faith is not lived out in isolation. When someone says they do not have to attend church in order to be a Christian is technically right. However, the church is the vehicle Jesus gave to us to strengthen our faith. God knows the world is too much to handle on our own. We need the support and encouragement of fellow believers to remain faithful and to band together to make a difference outside of the church walls.

Finally, Sticky Faith is both mature and maturing. A person with a lasting faith will show marks of spiritual maturity. What are the marks of spiritual maturity? They are the fruit of the Spirit that Paul gives us Galatians 5. When a person has Sticky Faith, their lives will show signs of love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. However, we all know none of us will achieve all of these marks of spiritual maturity. We are all working towards developing them in our lives. It is a journey and we are all on a different part of that journey. None of us have arrived on this side of heaven. Therefore, we are all still maturing. A person with Sticky Faith will continue to strive toward being Christ-like.

I know that over the last year, we have talked about Sticky Faith in the context of our children and youth ministries. However, Sticky Faith is something that we are all working on whether we are a member of the Millennial Generation or a member of the Greatest Generation or somewhere in between. Sometimes it can seem as elusive as Bigfoot or UFOs. At other times, you recognize it when you see it.

 One of those moments occurred last Sunday. Jordan Spieth, a 22-year-old professional golfer, had his second consecutive Masters championship in his grasp. He had led the tournament since the opening round. With just nine holes to go, he had a five-stroke lead. He gave up a couple of shots on the 10th and 11th holes but he held onto his lead. Then disaster struck on the 12th hole. After hitting a couple of balls in the water, he walked off the green with a quadruple bogey and trailing by three shots. He ended up finishing second, largely due to the unimaginable 7 on the 12th hole. Of course the media was interested in learning what Jordan thought about his performance. Even though you could see his disappointment on his face and hear it in his voice, he still stood there and exemplified grace and maturity. His fruit of the Spirit shined through his actions. He was patient. He was kind. He was gentle. He showed self-control. He showed joy even in midst of incredible pain. So maybe Sticky Faith isn’t so hard to find after all.