



Roanoke, Virginia

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“When Young Gets Old”

I Samuel 8:4-22, Galatians 1:6-7

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In just over two weeks, Dr. Andrew Root will be here to offer the 2025 Edmunds Lectures. The lectures will not begin on Sunday evening, but rather on Monday and Tuesday evenings at 7:00 pm—so please mark your calendars and invite friends, neighbors, and anyone curious about faith, culture, and the life of the church.

I’ve been reading Root’s work for some time now, and it has influenced my teaching and preaching. While my first commitment is to preach my heart and mind for this congregation, one little side benefit of my engagement with his work is that those who come to the lectures will have a bit of familiarity with his voice and ideas.

This sermon has also been influenced by Root’s writing. Before I preach it though, let’s pray.

Prayer for Illumination:

Holy God, help us find our place in your Holy Word... and Will. Amen.

Today, I want to explore our culture’s obsession with innovation, and the way that obsession shapes—and sometimes distorts—our lives

- how we are swept into
 - the new,



- the faster,
- the better,
- the next big thing—
- and what that does to
 - our souls,
 - our relationships,
 - our church,
 - our world.

First, let's hear the reading of one of our Scripture passages for today.

I Samuel 8:4-22

⁴ Then all the elders of Israel gathered together and came to Samuel at Ramah ⁵ and said to him, “You are old, and your sons do not follow in your ways; appoint for us, then, a king to govern us, like other nations.” ⁶ But the thing displeased Samuel when they said, “Give us a king to govern us.” Samuel prayed to the Lord, ⁷ and the Lord said to Samuel, “Listen to the voice of the people in all that they say to you, for they have not rejected you, but they have rejected me from being king over them. ⁸ Just as they have done to me from the day I brought them up out of Egypt to this day, forsaking me and serving other gods, so also they are doing to you. ⁹ Now then, listen to their voice; only, you shall solemnly warn them and show them the ways of the king who shall reign over them.”

¹⁰ So Samuel reported all the words of the Lord to the people who were asking him for a king. ¹¹ He said, “These will be the ways of the king who will reign over you: he will take your sons and appoint them to his chariots and to be his horsemen, and to run before his chariots, ¹² and he will appoint for himself commanders of thousands and commanders of fifties and some to plow his ground and to reap his harvest and to make his implements of war and the equipment of his chariots. ¹³ He will take your daughters to be perfumers and cooks and bakers. ¹⁴ He will take the best of your fields and vineyards and olive orchards and give them to his courtiers. ¹⁵ He will take one-tenth of your grain and of your vineyards and give it to his officers and his courtiers. ¹⁶ He will take your male and female slaves and the best of your cattle and donkeys and put them to his work. ¹⁷ He will take one-tenth of your flocks, and you shall be his slaves. ¹⁸ And on that day you will cry out because of your king, whom you have chosen for yourselves, but the Lord will not answer you on that day.”

¹⁹ But the people refused to listen to the voice of Samuel; they said, “No! We are determined to have a king over us, ²⁰ so that we also may be like other nations and that our king may govern us and go out before us and fight our battles.” ²¹ When Samuel heard all the words of the people, he repeated them in the ears of the Lord. ²² The Lord said to Samuel, “Listen to their voice and set a king over them.” Samuel then said to the Israelites, “Each of you return home.”

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“Creativity and Innovation.”

Both are highly prized in our culture today—and often for good reasons.

That’s certainly true in business. Think back to the glory days of IBM and General Electric. These weren’t just companies; they were institutions promising stability, reliability, and order. Few employees were expected to be creative—at least not at work. Wear the dark clothes, carry the briefcase, and follow the manual. Wait till you get home to express yourself.

But things have changed.

Companies like Apple and Microsoft entered the field, companies that prized innovation over stability. They sought workers who think independently, collaborate in small teams, and dream up the next big product. Old hierarchies gave way to “team leaders” and “project managers,” and the workplace became a creative lab.

Traditional giants like IBM and GE didn’t know what hit them. Neither did Sears or Belk when Amazon reshaped how the world shopped. Even once-innovative companies like AOL fell behind as new platforms emerged.

If there’s a mission statement that could be shared by many of these newer, fast-moving companies, it might be this: “*Stay Young.*”

With that shift, something else happened. The old social contract—that if you gave loyalty to the company, the company would take care of you—began to crumble. Technology moves too fast for yesterday’s successes to matter. And many workers were ready for change. The endless repetition of factory or office life could feel soul-sucking.

Notice what else has changed: the line between work and home is eroding.

- My father’s generation often spent too much time at work believing long hours were the price of providing for the home.
- Later, conversation shifted to work–life balance—to setting boundaries and resisting the 60-hour workweek.
- Now, many people live large portions of their private lives online—through Facebook, Instagram, TikTok—
 - some even making their living by turning private life into public content.

The mission statement is the same: “*Stay Young.*”



I'm not condemning this shift. Innovation is necessary in this business climate. And I know that the blurring of work and home lives works well for some. I love much of the creativity on social media: the clever lip-syncs, the dancing, the harmless pranks, and the videos that make the impossible seem possible. And if you can make money being creative, that's wonderful.

But for many young people, self-worth becomes tied to how fresh, creative, and original they appear. Likes measure value, and criticism—real or bot—can crush spirits. Studies show that the rise in depression, anxiety, and loneliness among the youth correlates strongly with social media use.

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The church is not immune. Innovation has become the celebrated path to church renewal. “Innovate or die,” pastors and churches are told. Seminary students are urged to think like entrepreneurs:

- Start new worshiping communities in coffee shops and bars.
- Use video clips in sermons.
- Scrap committees and work only in teams.
- Deconstruct the faith to reconstruct it—
 - until it's time to deconstruct it again.

But Andy Root—a professor of youth ministry who you might expect to be leading the charge for innovation—offers a caution. He argues that *innovation* has become our *new salvation story*. The promise we once sought from God—renewal, life-made-whole, resurrection of life—has been replaced by the promise of the new, the creative, the next big thing.

We want to be saved

- from decline,
- from irrelevance,
- from getting old.

And in our time, the *Gospel of Innovation* is the story that claims to deliver.

But some who are weary of the constant pressure to innovate at work—or even in their private lives—may find that the added demand to be endlessly innovative in their spiritual lives feels life-draining rather than life-giving. “Innovate or die” preaches a secular gospel: survival depends on creativity rather than God's grace.

Now, creativity is a gift of God—it can be a sign of the Spirit's life in us, it can be a wonderful tool for ministry. But when creativity becomes the measure of life and worth, we risk



forgetting that hope lies not in staying young, but in being made new by the One who makes all things new.

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Our passage from I Samuel speaks, in part, to how innovation can be overvalued.

The people of Israel—a loose collection of tribes—want to modernize. They want a king. They imagine that becoming a nation with a king will make them strong—will bring security, prestige, and power.

Their most powerful figure isn't a king; it's a prophet named Samuel, who keeps reminding them that their life and identity depend on God alone. But they see Samuel as the past, not the future. (*And they're not entirely wrong, his children are corrupt, and his ways have become stuck—but that's another sermon.*)

“You are old,” they tell him. “You are old, Samuel, and we *need young*.”

Then they ask for what would be “new” to them, though it is as old as Egypt with its Pharaohs: “Give us a king.”

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Just as the people of Israel look for an innovation to make them strong, secure, and—dare I say it—*young again*, we look for our own innovations in the world around us.

- New products.
- New platforms.
- New sense of self.
- New ways of doing church.

We chase novelty, hoping it will keep us relevant, energized, and fulfilled.

But the story of Israel reminds us that *novelty is not where life and renewal ultimately come from*. It may be necessary to be innovative in today's world, but God's promise does not depend on

- novelty,
- staying young,
- or keeping up with the latest trends.

Paul's words to the Galatians ring clearly here:



⁶I am astonished that you are so quickly deserting the one who called you in the grace of Christ and are turning to a different gospel— ⁷not that there is another gospel, but there are some who are confusing you and want to pervert the gospel of Christ.

In chapter 5, Paul describes the Gospel of Christ in this way:

For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision counts for anything; the only thing that counts is faith working through love. If we are in Christ, we are a new creation. The old has gone, the new has come.

Paul reminds us that real transformation, true renewal, doesn't come from staying young or keeping up. It comes from being made new in Christ—a renewal that is grounded in the grace of God's unconditional love which shapes

- our hearts,
- our imagination,
- and our lives

far beyond any trend or innovation.

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Grace is not the reward for our ingenuity but is the gift that frees us from the need to prove ourselves at all.

When the church is grounded in God's grace, it offers rest from the wearing world. Root reminds us that we are not always faithful to God when we simply adopt the cultural yoke of perpetual reinvention. The church is faithful when in worship, in prayer, in the rhythms of church life, we are invited

- to pause,
- to remember we are accepted unconditionally,
- and to encounter a life not measured by
 - likes,
 - trends,
 - or achievements.

The church offers living tradition and constancy—hymns, liturgies, familiar prayers and readings. They aren't burdens; they are anchors. Some things do not change, even as the world demands constant change.



Out of tradition and constancy, innovation can flourish—appropriately and organically, helping others find fresh avenues.

- Worship can discover new songs.
- Education can use new media and curricula.
- New opportunities for outreach, and new ways of meeting needs present themselves.

Innovation is a wonderful tool when it is not a tyrant. Faith, at its best, nurtures rather than tests. We are made new—not by our effort—but by God.

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What does this mean for us, here and now?

Young People—feeling the pressure to keep up, to prove yourselves, to stay relevant. Remember, your worth is not measured by speed, likes, or novelty. You are loved by God, fully and unconditionally. Creativity is a gift, not a requirement.

Workers—those working in offices, shops, schools, factories or at home, who are asked to adapt constantly, to innovate on demand. Rhythms of prayer, worship, and Sabbath can restore what the world drains.

Parents and caregivers—juggling the endless demands of home and work: You cannot do everything. Grace meets you in ordinary acts of love, which shape lives more profoundly than any trend.

Retired or Older Adults—who may feel overlooked in a culture obsessed with youth: Your wisdom, presence, and memory of what is true and what sustains, are invaluable. You can guide and sustain younger generations.

No matter our age or work status, God’s grace sustains us. God helps us live in a world of rapid change without being consumed by it. We create, we learn, we innovate—but always from a place rooted in God’s steadfast love.

- We do not need to “stay young” to matter.
- We do not need to reinvent ourselves to be made new.

The Spirit does that work, giving us life, rest, and hope.

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So, when *young gets old*, remember this: our value, our renewal, our hope, do not come from speed, novelty, or applause. They come from the God



- who does not change,
- who loves us as we are,
- and who makes all things new.

Benediction:

- Go now in the grace of God, who calls the young and the old, the busy and the weary, into life that is not measured by speed or success, but by steadfast love.
- Go in the Spirit of Christ, who makes all things new, giving hope to those who are worn, courage to those who are anxious, and joy to those who long for peace.

And

- May the God who never grows old renew your strength for each new day.
- May Christ, who makes all things new, give rest to your weary spirit.
- And may the Spirit's quiet creativity fill your life with peace, joy, and hope — this day and forevermore. Amen.

