

## Seeing Our Lives Through Changed Eyes

*By Rev. Jim Stinson, Consultant for Older Adult Ministries*

“And The Mountains Echoed” is a fascinating and disturbing novel by Khaled Hosseini, author of “The Kite Runner” and “A Thousand Splendid Suns.” In heart-wrenching detail, he tells the story of a family from Afghanistan who, over a 60-year period, continue to be affected by decisions made in earlier generations. It is a sometimes grim reminder that, while we are free to alter our responses to the events of our lives, thus changing ourselves in some real way, we are always to some extent the product of our pasts.

We all know this as a truism. How often we’ve responded to a situation in a certain way and discovered, “I’m just like my father (or mother, sister, friend).” We have all discovered ways in which the past has shaped us into who we are today. All too often though we use that discovery as an excuse for keeping bad habits, inappropriate responses to others, and not taking responsibility for our own response to the events of our lives.

There is a part of all of us that finds comfort in feeling that “we have always been this way, as have our family members.” We take comfort in seeing and responding to life as we’ve been shaped to see it. It is so much easier than accepting the challenge of growing, which always involves changing, the challenge of seeing our lives through different lenses.

Growing old is relatively easy. All we have to do is to keep having birthdays. Growing in maturity is a different story. It takes work to see the effects of aging through new eyes. It takes work to break from the old ways of seeing passed down to us from others from a different time and generation. While anyone can grow old, not anyone can grow mature. That takes a willingness to be aware of our past, without letting it control us. That takes openness to seeing ever-present changes and limitations as more than a sign of growing old. It takes a decided effort to see the changes as an invitation to grow in new directions, rather than to be daunted by what “we can no longer do.” Maturity is seeing the reality of our present situation and allowing ourselves to grow through them rather than be diminished by them.

A challenge for any of us who are concerned for older adults is helping them discover a variety of ways to respond to any situation, perhaps more in a context of a faith that proclaims a God who walks with us and encourages an embracing of life at every stage. It is to avoid life-denying responses in favor of placing the possibility of resurrected living as an option, as a new way of responding to aging.