

Sermon 8-16-09¹
Psalm 111
Ephesians 4:1-16
We Must No Longer be Children

Last week, we spent a considerable amount of time looking at Paul's prayer in Ephesians 3, honing in on the strength we receive from the Holy Spirit and the power of Jesus dwelling within us. From there we looked at what these things mean in our day-to-day lives. Specifically, we looked at the power of Jesus to change and transform us from the inside out. Being rooted and grounded in Christ's love, we noted that it is impossible not to be changed although we are prone to resist the work of Jesus in molding and shaping us. Nevertheless, Jesus is at work so we can let go and let Christ take over the process of molding and shaping. Remembering Paul's prayer for our lives and the life of the church, we dive into the practical implications of all Paul has lead us to in chapter four.

The presence of Jesus dwelling within us through the power of the Holy Spirit has a profound impact on who we are, how we're called to live, and what it means to be the Church of Jesus Christ. Working out of this premise, Paul urges the Ephesian Church to "Lead a life worthy of the calling to which you've been called." Basically, he's urging them (and us) to "get out there and walk on the road God has called us to travel." And continuing, "I don't want you sitting around on your hands. I don't want anyone strolling off, down some path that goes nowhere. And mark that you do this with humility and discipline—not in fits and starts, but steadily, pouring yourselves out for each other in acts of love, alert at noticing differences and quick at mending fences. You are all called to travel on the same road and in the same direction, so stay together, both outwardly and inwardly. You have

¹ Sermon preached by the Rev. Thomas E. Moore on Sunday, August 16, 2009 at Emsworth UP Church. ©2009

one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who rules over all, works through all, and is present in all.”² According to Paul, the power and presence of Jesus Christ, dwelling within the lives of believers, brings about a peculiar and distinctive identity; bringing about a way of living that is a little counter-intuitive and requires change, transformation, and growth.

“We must no longer be children,” Paul proclaims, “tossed to and fro.” There’s no room for any prolonged infancies within the church. For Paul, there’s no toleration for lost adults acting the part of infant sheep, wandering in the woods; children who are an easy target for those who would lead them astray. “God wants us to grow up, to know the whole truth and tell it in love—like Christ in everything.”³ According to Paul, one of the biggest changes and transformations that the indwelling of Jesus brings about in the Christian life is growing mature in the faith. It’s moving from a point of spiritual immaturity and spiritual infancy to a point of healthy spiritual maturity; it’s growing each and every day in our discipleship – leaving behind childish beliefs and ways to live into our identity as those who belong to Christ, taking our lead from him, and knowing that as we belong to him so Jesus himself guides us on our way to maturity. This is surely one of the more challenging aspects to the Christian life of discipleship.

As adults, when we first make our way into the life of faith there is a certain level of immaturity that presents itself. What I mean is, we can lack the depth of vision, carry a level of naïveté about the church or about the way God works in the world, and struggle when it comes to digging deeper into the depths of scripture and our beliefs. As a result, it’s easy to buy into outright lies and false ways of thinking that are contrary to the Word of God. It’s

² Eugene Peterson, *The Message*, 409.

³ *Ibid.*, 410.

easy to be tossed about like a ship on the sea because of someone's trickery or deceit. And in the end, what you end up with is a church that isn't sure which way is up and a faith-life that isn't firmly grounded in the fullness of God. In the end, if you get God wrong, you get life and the life of discipleship wrong.

For starters, the life of faith and the life of discipleship is more than just getting the right answer on the bible test or having the appropriate answer to some deep theological question; rather, it's mostly about being nurtured and nourished in a relationship with the Lord our God, revealed to our hearts and minds in, through, and as Jesus Christ by the power of the Holy Spirit. It's about living into that relationship whereby our lives are so filled by the life of Christ dwelling within us that we become the people God is calling us to be. Remain immature in our relationship with God, remain as children in our relationship and we'll be sorely disappointed by the shallowness that exists in our lives.

Take any relationship in your own lives, whether it's a friendship, a romantic relationship, or even a familial relationship – in all of these there has to be growth or no relationship would truly be experienced in full. Something would be held back or misinterpreted. Every relationship we enter into involves an infancy stage; a stage where we feel out the other person in our attempts to know them better. We develop a certain way of looking at the other person and cast them in a certain light that helps us in this endeavor. Often these relationships are principally built upon cursory conversations; you don't talk to someone about your deep dark secrets or your most intimate thoughts and experiences until a level of trust and growth has occurred. Relationships begin in an infantile stage but they always mature or they die. It's simple as that. That's one of the reasons, I believe, that the divorce rate is as high as it is; no one wants to take the time

nourishing and nurturing a relationship to the point of maturity. All relationships must progress, must mature, or in the end we're left with a hole that is empty and shallow. Our relationship with God is no different.

One of my favorite theologians, Tom Torrance, tells a wonderful story of his early ministry that deals with a young man's journey from an infantile faith to a much more robust and mature faith. While he was teaching as a guest lecturer at Auburn Seminary, Torrance "experienced particular difficulty with one student who objected strongly to belief in the divinity of Christ, and to the cost of discipleship which acceptance of Christ as the incarnate Son of God involved. The student in question stormed into Torrance's room after a lecture, and made it clear to him that he was very angry over the matter. Torrance recalls saying to him: 'Paul, the very fact that you are so angry indicates that it is not that you cannot believe in the Deity of Christ, but that you don't want to.' At this the student left abruptly and disappeared for three days. Then he returned, knocked at the door, and asked Torrance to go out and have a meal with him. They found a quiet restaurant where they could talk...leaning across the table, the student told Torrance: 'You are right. If Jesus Christ is not the Son of God, I can do what I like, follow his teaching or not as I choose. But if he really is God, then I have no alternative but to follow him and obey him.'"⁴ What the young man experienced was the crucifixion of his ego as he moved from an infant faith to a more robust and mature relationship with Jesus Christ. We too must experience the crucifixion of our egos as we continue to mature in our relationship with our living, reigning, active, and present Lord and Savior.

⁴ Alister McGrath, *Thomas F. Torrance: An Intellectual Biography* (T&T Clark: Edinburgh, 1999), 55.

An infant faith thinks of God as some benevolent, loving, and doting grandfather just waiting to hand out treats and goodies to his spoiled rotten children because that's what he is supposed to do. An infant faith looks at the love of God as if it is an example for how we should try to live if we so choose and thinks of the cross of Jesus Christ as if it is an example of the moral goodness we should seek to emulate. An infant faith will believe anything that anyone puts out there, whether it's true or false. An infant faith will only go so far until it hits bottom and you're left with nothing to show for it but a deep sadness and regret. With no growth, an infant faith will die.

A mature and robust faith, on the other hand, grows day-by-day into a relationship with the Lord our God who out of the freedom of his love penetrated into the depths of our sin and brokenness in, through, and as Jesus Christ, being nailed to a cross for us and our salvation so that we might be set free from their destructive powers and might have Jesus himself dwelling within us by the power of the Holy Spirit to shape our growth. A mature faith life devotes itself to knowing God more and more; to spending time with Jesus on a daily basis and being enriched in the community of faith that is his body. A mature faith seeks to grow with others, seeks to develop a richer prayer life, delves into the depths of God's Word, isn't afraid of asking deeply probing questions to grow, so that in all things our relationship with our Lord and God might be strengthened, nurtured, and taken to a whole new level.

Paul's advice to the church is sound and wise: we must no longer be children in the faith. It's not as if this is Paul's urgent desire; rather it's what God really wants for us. The power and presence of Jesus in our lives, changing us from the inside out is just as much about our transformation into disciples as it is about growing and maturing in the life of

faith. And we shouldn't expect as if it happens in some flash or instantaneous moment. Maturity takes time and cultivation. Maturity doesn't happen on our own either, but in the midst of the community of faith. It's a part of what we're here for, a part of who we are as the body of Christ, as those whom Jesus himself dwells within out of the freedom of his love in the power of his Spirit, that we might truly lead a life worthy of the calling to which we've been called. Praise, glory, and honor be to the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit; now and unto ages of ages. Amen.