

Ephesians 4:1-16 Pastor Bill Uetricht 8/2/09 9 Pentecost

I've been thinking about maturity lately, in part because of what the author of Ephesians says in our second lesson for today and because of some experiences I have had lately. One of our members on her Facebook page recently posted this: "Why oh why do some women never outgrow the cattiness of middle school girls?" Now I am not a woman nor do I play one on TV, so I do not feel at all capable of responding adequately to this observation. Yet I do sense in the observation a longing on the part of the poster for growth in maturity.

Both Facebook and My Space are fascinating sociological studies. And I have noted lately how they can in some cases take immaturity to the next level. Because in such arenas we don't have to talk to people face to face we can make all kinds of comments that perhaps we would not make if we were looking at another person eye to eye. And sometimes those comments can be less than mature—little digs that result in the proverbial "he-said-that-she-said-that-he-shouldn't-have-said" phenomenon. And then we have hurt feelings, angry emotions, and further conversations on Facebook, My Space, or the omnipresent cell phone. And many find themselves wondering if people ever outgrow the immaturity of middle school boys or girls.

Heck, the church is not exempt from such immaturity. Oh, we can do the he-said-she-said reality as well as anyone. And as I indicated last week we can be really good at the childish "if-they-won't-play-the-way-I-think-they-should-then-I-will-just-quit" behavior.

I have to admit that sometimes I feel a bit immature, especially in my relationship with my wife. When I get mad at her I'll say to myself: I just won't talk to her then. That will show her! Ya right!

“The gifts that he gave were that some would be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, some pastors and teachers, to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ, until all of us come to the unity of faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to maturity, to the measure of the full stature of Christ.” In these words from Ephesians, one of Paul’s disciples is urging the church at Ephesus to realize, first of all, the unity that is our gift in Christ, and then, secondly, the diversity that is a part of that unity. We have been gifted differently. Some of us are teachers. Some of us are pastors. Some of us are leaders. Some of us are followers. Yet that uniqueness, Paul’s disciple says, is for the sake of building up the whole, so that all of us might come into the unity that is our gift, so that we might become more mature in Christ, might reach the full stature of Christ.

Ephesians says that “we must no longer be children, tossed to and fro and blown about by every wind of doctrine, by people’s trickery, by their craftiness in deceitful scheming.” Children, immature people, often are tossed to and fro by just about everything. They rise and fall on new teachings, people’s comments, changes in culture, changes in church life. Immature people can be easily led astray. They can be easily distracted, easily frustrated, easily angered, easily led up and down the hills of the roller coaster. Ephesians says that we are gifted uniquely so that we together might be taken to the more mature place.

Ephesians’ perspective on maturity, though, is a little different than we might anticipate. Often when you and I want to bring people to the more mature place we try to cajole them into it. “It’s time for you to grow up,” we might say. “Stop being so childish,” we boldly assert. That is not Ephesians’ way. The maturity that Ephesians wants to take us to is a maturity that is not necessarily something that we

need to attain, something that if we just work hard enough we will achieve. No, for the author of Ephesians, maturity is something that is already given. This author for the first three chapters of his letter lays out his theological argument that suggests that in Christ Jews and Gentiles are brought together. He says that the unity of all people is what God had planned from the very beginning. The maturity of the church—the unity of all—is what God intended from before even creation.

So unity is not something we talk people into; it is not something that if we all just got along we will create. No, it is God's gift to us. What represents what maturity is all about—unity—is something that is given to all of us, given to the church. We don't create the unity. There is, Ephesians says, one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of us all. God is one. The faith is one. There is only one baptism. In other words, unity is what God does, God gives. The maturity that we are after is something that God has already given us. The task, then—and this may be hard for us to understand intellectually—is for us individually and as the church to become what we already are. We, those who have been baptized into the one baptism, have the status of being the children of God. We the baptized have the status of being united. The call is to be what we already are. What you are being beckoned to become you already are.

“So I beg you to lead a life worthy of the call to which you have been called, with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love, making every effort to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.” Your task is not to create the unity. Thank God; that is a big task. That is an overwhelming responsibility. Your task is to maintain it, to live into what is your gift. You are a child

not of the world—a reality that breeds immature people who rise and fall on everything, who drown in the cattiness of middle school life, who take their toys and play in some other yard when they get mad. You are a child of God whose status is secure, whose worth is unquestioned. You are part of a family that is united, whose maturity is already given. Now grow up . . . into what you already are.

Do you get the sense that Jesus in our gospel lesson is perturbed with the crowds because they are quite immature? Listen to what he says to the people who have been searching long and hard to find him: “You are looking for me, not because you saw the signs, but because you ate the fill of the loaves.” The claim is that the crowd’s faith is not very mature. They only want to find him so that they can get another meal. He wowed them when he fed 5000 of them. They are after him to get more food. How immature, he says! “Do not work for the food that perishes, but for the food that endures for eternal life.”

What does it mean to grow up into what you already are, grow up into the stature of Christ? What does it mean to be mature in faith? It is to work for the food that endures for eternal life. It is to go the deeper places. It is to seek after the bread of life. (Tomorrow we will) Today we placed Emma Kay Lee into the great river of baptism—the river that is the story of Jesus, the river that is the story of the people of God of every place and time. This is a deep, deep river. Emma, what you are being welcomed into is not a store from which you purchase consumer items, a store that somehow is meant to meet your every perceived need. It is not an institution that once in a while you pay dues to so that you can get what you want from it. It is not one more thing for your to-do list. (“You know I should go to church!”) No, Emma, what you are being welcomed into is the overwhelming story of

life—the story that gives life meaning, and purpose, the story that indeed is the bread of life. What you are being welcomed into is the community from which you draw your very identity—an identity given by God.

This is not a shallow river. So don't be content with shallowness. Don't be content with your own immaturity in relationship to people and the community of faith. God has taken you to the deeper places. God has given you an identity. So become what you already are. And make sure that you share your gifts with the community so that all of us come to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the son of God, to maturity, to the measure of the full stature of Christ.