

How do you measure being grown up?

What do you want to do when you are grown up? We are often asked as children.

I am sure that many of you have marks on the doorframe where your children, grandchildren, nieces or nephews have marked their heights at different points in their lives. I had to measure the dog once to compare his grown up ness with my 3 year old nephew!

It's very easy to think about how we measure grown up ness in statistics because of the way we measure children's progress these days. It is very statistically based- did they attain above expectations, expected levels or below expected levels- did they achieve in their SATS? Do they have paper qualifications, and university qualifications?

National report by the children's society, a couple of years ago, concerned children's happiness. Even though children have more opportunities today than perhaps ever before, there is evidence that they feel more isolated, depressed and bullied. Which raises the question- how do we want our young people and children to **be**? What characteristics could we value in them? And as parental figures, or parents and as the 'mother' church how do we encourage that growth in them?

The Bible has two different paradigms on growth- on the one hand, we are told that in order to enter the kingdom of God, we must become like children. *Let the children come to me and do not turn them away. Anyone who enters the kingdom of God must do so like a child.*

On the other hand we are told that we need to put away childish ways and become mature- *When I was a child, I spoke and thought and reasoned as a child. But when I grew up, I put away childish things. (1 Corinthians 13:11, NLT)*

What do these mean?

In spiritual terms, Jesus encourages all who try to follow his ways to be humble as a child, recognising their lowly state. In Jesus teaching about the kingdom those who are humble are those who realise that they are not self-sufficient but dependent on others, and on God. We are to acknowledge our dependence and low stature before God and come to her as children—humbly, in love and gratitude.

At the last Supper, in John 13, Jesus speaks to his followers as if he was speaking to children, my darlings- in the Greek- *Teknion- a term of endearment and an affection. Darling children, beloved, teachable children.* He instructs them on how to live for him- by loving one another as he has loved them.

So how did he love them?

Sacrificially –Yes

As friends- he listened to and taught them

With challenge and judgement- give up the desire for wealth and status, help the poor and isolated, practice forgiveness again and again, live peaceably in community without petty quarrelling.

With prayer for friends and enemies

Which of these are the most challenging for us a children of God today?

Secondly, It is also recognised by Jesus and the leaders of the early church, that even as adults we have a tendency to revert to childish ways.

In counselling terms, it is recognised that even as adults we have an inner child, an inner teenager and an inner adult all sitting around our adult self– and sometimes our emotional responses to events in adult life get stuck in a childhood response because we have not processed them well, and need help to do so in order to 'grow up'.

In the context of 1 Corinthians, the Corinthian Christian church was being told off because some people were putting their own private needs before the needs of the community. (They were speaking in tongues without consideration for others.) In today's epistle to the Corinthians we hear the church being urged to clothe themselves with humility, compassion and love, to seek the truth and seek peace- more than likely because these were things that they weren't doing and needed to be reminded to do! Of course, we all need reminders.

That is partly why we meet together, to spur each other on in Christ-like ness. We are encouraged to grow up in faith and action.

In the Spirituality of the Eastern church, the desert fathers and mothers guided people to become more grown up through naming the tendencies that lead to sin- what we perhaps would call the seven deadly sins. The thought was that Christians needed to actively acknowledge that both within themselves and the world were 'cracks in the heart' that could lead to sin and come before others and God. The cracks included Gluttony, Lust, Greed, Sadness (self-pity), Anger, sloth, vainglory and pride.

The aim of the spiritual life was to become purer which would enable the believer to truly contemplate God.

So what could this growth look like today?

Mike Yakonelli who writes of Messy Spirituality says this

- a. Spiritual growth is messy and involves thousands of decisions- growing towards God one decision at a time
- b. Spiritual growth looks different for each of us- resting, wanting, celebrating, learning, growing, returning to God with our successes and failures
- c. God will show up in whatever percentage of our lives we can give to God
- d. Reluctant growth is still growth

(I would say that spiritual growth has to include the following:

Love that builds others up and Love others into the church

Speaking the truth with grace

Look in the mirror, confess shortcomings, and radically cling to God. I find journaling, spiritual direction, worshipping together and private prayer and study all help but the baseline for me is one word in prayer- Jesus.)

Today we celebrate those figures, who have nurtured our growth in faith and life- who have helped us to grow up.

And we are challenged to consider- how can we enable each other to grow in our faith- especially the children of our community.

So let's spend a moment reflecting on what we feel God is saying to us that we need to put down, or clothe ourselves with in order to become more mature in Christ.

God, Our Beautiful Mother, and Father,

Help us to grow in love and virtue

that we may know your grace in our lives;

Help us to understand our own and other's weaknesses

that we may be an understanding, kind and compassionate community and grow in maturity, nurture and love. Amen.

(If a child lives with criticism, he learns to condemn.

If a child lives with hostility, she learns to fight.

If a child lives with ridicule, he learns to be shy.

If a child lives with shame, she learns to feel guilty.

If a child lives with tolerance, he learns to be patient.

If a child lives with praise, he learns to appreciate.

If a child lives with encouragement, she learns confidence.

If a child lives with fairness, she learns justice.

If a child lives with security, he learns to have faith.

If a child lives with approval, she learns to like herself.

If a child lives with acceptance and friendship, he learns to find love in the world. Dorothy Lawdville.)