



Grace to you and peace from God our Father and our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. **AMEN**

Do you remember back to when you were 15 years old and could hardly wait to get your drivers license? I remember that I turned 16 on a Sunday and was really bummed that I could not take my drivers test until Monday morning. I even remember the tester asking me one final question before he said I passed. He wanted to know the color of the last car we just passed at the stop sign. It was a truck not a car and I told him that, so I passed. I felt so grown up. A driver's license. What freedom that would bring. Do you remember those days when you were young that you felt really grown up for the first time?

Two weeks ago I turned 67, where has the time gone. Now I wish some days not to be so grown up, so old and want to have those care free days of youth back again. So what does growing up mean to you? Is it more than celebrating birthdays? What is true maturity? What exactly does it mean to be grown up, to be mature? How do we gain maturity and are we sure we really want too?

First of all I think that there is a big difference between what the world sees as maturity and what Christian maturity looks like. The world tells us that we are mature, all grown up when we can take care of ourselves, when we are independent, not relying on anyone. But for the Christian, maturity is not so

much about driving cars and being able to support oneself, rather, it is about living faithfully among God's people.

Let's think about living among God's people for a minute. Scripture tells us over and over again that we are created not only to be in relationship with God but also with one another. We are a people that need companionship and love from one another. So being isolated, I would imagine would be an awful thing.

In fact this past year has been very difficult for many people due to the fear of contracting COVID-19. Many people, I think, especially the elderly, have stayed isolated, locked up in their homes. In fact last Friday, I was able to talk with one of the counselors that use our building and she said the referrals for therapy have grown exponentially since the stay at home order first came down in Wisconsin in mid 2020. She said these referrals have been mostly from the elderly population. Of course I asked what she meant by elderly and she said over 60. Yikes, that is me, that's most of us! But mostly, she clarified, those who live alone are suffering from what has been known as pandemic fatigue or isolation.

I have never felt totally isolated in my life, but can certainly understand how people could feel that way. Isolation is probably one of the worst things that can happen to a human being. Many studies have been done over decades from rhesus monkey who sit alone in cages and rock back and forth, to prisoners who are put in solitary confinement due to bad behavior. Many researchers have come to the conclusion that total isolation can lead humans to not just depression but insanity. WOW!

In our Scripture text for this Transfiguration of Our Lord Sunday, we have Jesus taking Peter, James and John with him to the top of the mountain. There these three disciples saw Jesus transfigured before their eyes. It was a communal experience that no doubt helped grow their faith in the Son of God. It was an experience that could not be explained to anyone else. The feeling that that mountain top experience held for them was transformative, life-changing even though it could not be explained by worldly scientific means. The transfiguration of Jesus was one of those experiences that only the small community present could understand.

An example of another transforming thing that happens, hopefully to all of us is to fall in love. Talk about not being able to explain why I love Rodney and my children, is not easy, yet it is a meaningful and fulfilling experience in my

life that makes it whole. Worship is another experience that cannot be explained. One has to participate in it with others, in community, as we all look for meaning and wholeness in our lives.

And that wholeness in life is what I think Jesus wants for us and what Scripture refers to as Christian maturity. We need one another folks. As the Body of Christ, we are part of something bigger than ourselves. We are part of God's family, where we find something greater, living the life God intended for us to have. It is a something that is often not able to be explained, but it is a place where we feel whole and at peace.

Here at CTS we are all very blessed to be able to continue to worship and meet even during this long, long pandemic. Bigger churches and many others that have not figured out how to meet safely are losing that family feeling, that unity and support of being part of God's family. People are feeling isolated and falling into despair.

Remember again with me back to our high school days. And this summer is my 50<sup>th</sup> class reunion, where did those years go. But remember that there were certain groups in high school. There were the greasers, the goodie two shoes, the jock and stoners. Each of these groups had their own language and behaviors that were associated with the group. No wonder high school was such a difficult time for people. But experiencing being a part of one or more of these groups in your four years of high school was an important and a necessary part of growing up. We were struggling to find out who we were and where we belonged.

Then many of us went away from that scene and jumped into college, away from home for the first time. That was more of a learning experience, yet we still couldn't wait to grow up and mature. I remember at St Olaf College, I was always trying to buck the establishment. I did not go to church on Sunday and certainly did not make time to go to chapel Monday through Friday. Instead I went bowling, played lots of bridge and I did studied a bit. But after graduation, I felt very alone. All my high school friends were out of touch and there was no more living in a dorm room. I got a job, where there was another group to be close too.

But what I have found since leaving my family of origin, my high school days and college is that I need to be close to people. I long for that sense of belonging. And as I matured, I longed for the need to be who God made me to be. And that was to be a part of the body of Christ. For the last nine years it

has been my joy to be a part of this body of Christ at Christ the Servant. Here I think we all agree that we see our church family as a safe place where we can be who God made us to be. We can laugh and cry and just be human with each other. We make mistakes and forgiveness comes. We are not judged as the world judges. So, there are few divisions between us. We are maturing, growing up, if you will in the presence of the Holy Spirit to live and love as Jesus meant us to do. We can be holy and human together as the family of God.

And so whether we have a mountain top experience like we read about in our Gospel this morning or not, we are able to continue to mature in our community.

I do wish we all could have that WOW experience that Peter, James and John had that transfiguration day. This week as I was reading, I was reminded of a great story that was part of a Murphy Brown episode some years ago. In this particular episode, Murphy asked the staff about their thought or feeling about God. Quite a no, no for a TV show, but she asks and gets differing responses. One guy said he was an agnostic, who does not know who God really is. Another one was a Baptist, and the list goes on. But the response of the character Jim stands out here. He said he was a Presbyterian and went to church every Sunday with his wife. He said something on the order of, "I haven't had any experience of God. I go because it is obvious to me that the people who attend are experiencing God, and I am hoping that one day I will too." Yes, always easier to catch the faith when you are sitting next to it too!

So if your mountain top experience has not yet come or you are in need of another, get ready. A few things to consider. You must make yourself available. Peter, James and John were invited to the Transfiguration because they were already in the company of Jesus.

Secondly, make sure you learn as much as you can about your faith tradition. As we talked about on Sunday's Bible study, learn Scripture. Memorize Bible verses as they can, not only fend off the devil but they can help you keep in

touch with what you learned. Peter, James and John knew who Moses and Elijah were and how important they were to the story of God's people.

Thirdly, listen to Jesus. We are told in Scripture at Jesus' baptism and in our reading today to "Listen to Jesus". And we listen by reading His Word and we hear him in the voice of other Christians.

And last but not least have a right attitude. Be ready for God to wow you, to amaze you. He will bedazzle you just as He did with these three disciples. They were shocked to see Jesus' transfiguration. All these things are much easier to do in the company of other Christians. So never give up your place in this family of God. And as we mature together here in the presence of Christ we will learn what it means to love one another as Christ loved us. **AMEN**