Grow Up into Christ

Ephesians 4:1-6, 11-16 Kimby Young

 August 7, 2016

What do you want to be when you grow up? It’s been a long time since I have been asked that question. Maybe not so for some of you. But this passage today asks that question of all of us – at whatever age. It says we are all still growing up. Actually – it gives the answer to the question. Jesus is who we should all try to be when we grow up. We should all want to be more like Jesus Christ. We should all try to grow up into Christ. Impossible, you say? None of us can be that good. This passage says we can become Christ like by God’s grace. But the twist is we can’t do it alone. It is not that I will become better and better until I become like Christ, or you will, or any of us individually. This scripture is saying together – and only together – **we** will grow into Christ. We the body of Christ will “grow up” into the head of the body which is Christ – we will grow up until we “the body” fit the head that is Christ. You have heard this image many times before. Together – we are the body of Christ. We are the hands and feet, the head and heart. Each of us has a job to do. Each of us has a role to play. And the body is only complete if we all share our gifts. But this passage takes the image one more step – if we all share our gifts and do our part and act in love – then a miracle happens – Christ is alive again on Earth serving the world. The body of Christ comes alive here and now. We become that physical body of Christ – the whole measure of the fullness of Christ. That is the call of God to the church today. That is the call of God to us today here and now at First Presbyterian Church. Be the body of Christ – grow up into the fullness of Christ.

So when the author says to the church, “I urge you to live a life worthy of the calling to which you have been called” – that is I urge you to live as the body of Christ active in the world - what do you think? are we there yet? Well, I’d say we have a little room to grow. Not being critical, just being honest. We can continue growing up into Christ. But I would also say, we are on the way. We do what we can to live God’s love in the world. We are trying. You can feel good about that. This church is serving God well and faithfully. And of course there is always room to grow.

This scripture passage talks about things that can throw us off. Verse 14 talks about not being “tossed back and forth as on waves, or blown here and there by wind.” It’s a great image. If you have ever been on a rocky boat, or a bumpy airplane, then you know. If you have ever stood in the ocean and felt the pounding of the waves, it can almost knock you down. If you have ever tried to walk or even stand in a strong gale force wind – you get the image. You can be pushed around pretty easily. You can lose your footing very fast. And that is true in our faith as well. We sometimes get pushed around and lose our balance – sometimes by life circumstances when things go wrong, sometimes by outside influences or opinions, sometimes by difficult decisions we have to make. This passage says - Stay grounded in Christ. Keep your focus on God’s will. How do you keep your balance when the world tosses you around? You hold on to something solid. How do you keep your way when you are going against the wind? You keep your focus on one dependable point. The reminder here is keep your eyes on Christ. Hold on to Christ. Measure everything – every decision, every action, every word, every choice by what you have seen and known in Jesus Christ. The old phrase is “what would Jesus do?” You have a solid foundation in Jesus Christ. If you wonder what to do – think about the way Jesus lived and the way Jesus loved. Jesus cared for the poor and the needy. Jesus welcomed the stranger. Jesus healed the broken. Jesus stood up for the outcast. Jesus forgave even those who hurt him. Jesus gave of himself and called us to do the same. And Jesus, more than anything else, pointed us toward God. Jesus showed us how God loves and cares and challenges and heals and comforts and strengthens and empowers. So hold on to that. Stay grounded in that love and grace. Hold on to all you have experienced of God’s presence, all you have learned of Jesus’ love – and no one can make you falter.

And once again, I say … if you are feeling shaky these days, if you are feeling tossed to and fro, and you need a reminder of God’s presence in your life, if you need to talk to someone – come talk to me or anyone here at church. That’s what this passage says – we are here to build up one another, to support one another, to be the presence of Christ for one another. Let me pray with you and for you, and you pray for me as well. I need it – I need your prayers. We need each other. That is what verse 13 means – to grow up into Christ, “to become mature, attaining the whole measure of the fullness of Christ.” Together we are more of what God calls us to be.

This scripture passage gives some concrete advice about how to continue to grow up into Christ. We’ve heard some of the phrases in other passages this summer – “Bear with one another in love. Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace. Speak the truth in love.” You can think about what that means specifically for you and for First Presbyterian Church. What truth needs to be spoken? What unity needs to be reinforced? And how can we do that in concrete ways- to build up one another? What can you do to do your part in building up the body of Christ – in helping us to grow up into Christ? What gift or talent can you offer? What encouragement can you give? I invite you to pray about that in the next few weeks and to think about how God is calling you. The nominating committee is calling elders and deacons right now, so pray about whether you might be called to that service and let me know if you feel that urging from God. And there are other roles as well that need your support – all of our pillars and committees – mission, worship, discipleship, congregational life. All of our programs could use new ideas and new people. This church is not a building or a heritage or an idea or a program. This church is the people. You are the body of Christ. And what you do makes all the difference.

And finally, remember – you are still growing up. We are still growing up into Christ. We are not there yet. We are not perfect. And We are not called to be perfect. We are called to stay grounded in Christ and to offer our best for God to use to God’s glory. The promise of God is that as long as we are connected to Christ, as long as the body is connected to the head, God will give us what we need – whatever we need. God will strengthen us, nourish us, provide for us and make us healthier every day. God will help us to grow and to accomplish whatever good work God sets before us. That is God’s promise. God will give us whatever we need to serve well and faithfully.

To remember that, God gives us reminders – concrete reminders of God’s promise and presence. Those reminders might include a sunset or a rainbow just when you need to see it, a loved one coming thru the door at just the right time, a phone call, a scripture verse, a gentle reminder that you are loved. Or even sometimes for some of us – a smack upside the head – to get us back on the right track and remind us to turn to Christ. Sometimes these reminders come right here in this room as we gather – in a cross or a prayer or song or the touch of a friend. You are loved. You are important. You belong to God. You are still growing up into Christ.

In a few moments we will gather around this table, we will share cup and bread, we will share this common meal. And we believe that in this sacrament, God opens the door to holiness. God offers us a glimpse of all that God can create in and thru us. As you pass these elements, as you take your individual piece which is part of the whole, remember that God is nourishing you, strengthening you and making you able to respond to God’s grace in the body of Christ. Just as the body needs food, so we as the body of Christ need to receive what God offers us so that we can continue to grow into Christ - to become stronger and healthier each day. So in a few minutes as you take the bread and drink the juice, let God’s Spirit fill you and inspire you. Let God strengthen you and bring any healing you may need. Let God empower you and encourage you to grow in grace and goodness, that together we may be God’s people. As verse 13 says until we “become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ.” I like the way the Message version of the Bible says it in verse 16, “We take our lead from Christ, who is the source of everything we do. Christ keeps us in step with each other. Jesus’ very breath and blood flow through us, nourishing us so that we will grow up healthy in God, robust in love.” Let Christ flow through you even as the air you breathe. Know that God is with you and share God’s love by God’s grace. Amen