



Saint John United Methodist Church
12700 W. Hwy. 42, Prospect, KY 40059
stjohnky.com

Message for October 18, 2020
“Well-Connected: Grow Up”
Speaker: Pastor Tom Grieb
Scripture: Ephesians 4:14-16

The Possibilities Are Limitless

If we heard it once, we heard it a thousand times when we were young, *“What do you want to be when you grow up?”* Some have spent their entire lives trying to figure that out.

I like the story told of the teacher who asked the little boy, *“Johnny, what do you want to be when you grow up?”*

He responded, *“I want to be possible.”*

“Why do you say that?” she asked.

“Because my mom is always telling me I am impossible. When I grow up I want to be possible.”

When it comes to our life in Christ, the possibilities are limitless.

Some Never Grow Up

The unfortunate thing is that some never really grow up when it comes to their spiritual lives. They may grow older, but they never grow up when it comes to their life in Christ. They stay right where they have been. They're like so many who are quite content to stay exactly where they are. You might say they are saved, but shallow. When it comes to their relationship with Jesus they are content to only scratch the surface.

In a church culture where everything is so seeker sensitive, people are never really challenged to the place of being uncomfortable. People aren't challenged to make any sort of sacrifice, forgetting that Jesus was all about sacrifice. After all, he made the ultimate sacrifice on the cross.

People are not really challenged to change, even though repentance is at the heart of the Christian faith. And because of all this and so much more, people never really grow up spiritually.

God Wants Us to Be Mature

God wants us to be mature. He wants us grow up in every way in Christ. He doesn't want us stuck, mired, or otherwise stagnant. When it comes to our spiritual lives, God longs for each of us to be vital and vibrant.

Last week, in talking about each of us being equipped for the work of ministry, Paul in Ephesians 4:13 talked about *“reaching unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God.”*

He wrote about becoming “*mature*,” growing up, if you will, “*attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ*.” Paul goes on to talk about that maturity—for the individual and for the church. He does so in Ephesians 4:14-16. By so doing, he encourages us to “*Grow Up*,” to become in every respect mature in Christ.

Let’s hear then Ephesians 4:14-16.

Then we will no longer be infants, tossed back and forth by the waves, and blown here and there by every wind of teaching and by the cunning and craftiness of people in their deceitful scheming. Instead, speaking the truth in love, we will grow to become in every respect the mature body of him who is the head, that is, Christ. From him the whole body, joined and held together by every supporting ligament, grows and builds itself up in love, as each part does its work.

Moving On to Solid Food

Where my office is located I have a front row seat looking out on our playground. All day long there are kids out there doing their thing. There are little kids and big kids. “*If play is a kid’s work*,” then these kids really do work hard. I particularly enjoy watching the younger kids play. They sort of toddle around, hence the name toddler. They are learning how to play together. Every once and a while there are a few tears. That’s all a part of growing up.

There’s a big difference between the play of the younger children in the morning and the older children in the afternoon. Regardless of age, the kids aren’t just getting bigger, they are maturing in all sorts of ways.

It wasn’t long ago that every one of those children was a baby. As a baby they were totally dependent upon somebody else for their care. If you think about it, a baby is inherently selfish. Their survival depends upon that selfishness. Babies are all but totally dependent upon somebody to feed them—day and night. Soon or later though that baby will graduate to what I’ll call real food. They won’t always be on formula or eating baby food.

I can’t imagine any of us on a steady diet of baby food. The carrots alone would keep us from eating all together. Yuck!! Moving on to solid food is just a part of growing up.

Our youngest grandson, Miles, is just now starting to eat baby food. It’s been a slow go transitioning from breast feeding. He’s going to have to do that if he is really going to grow like he’s supposed to. I figure that one day soon he’ll do just that. He will graduate to solid food and move on from there. I’m confident about that because I have never known a Grieb yet to turn down a meal. 😊

As Christians, we do well to move on to solid food as well.

Spiritual Infancy

You and I both know that spiritual infancy is rampant throughout the church. It’s as if people reach a certain point in their spiritual development and go no further. Youth grapple with some of the toughest subjects at school, but when it comes to growing in the Lord they can sort of check out. Adults deal with some of the most complex systems at work, but when it comes to becoming spiritually mature they figure it’s just too tough.

Paul has a pretty stern word about such things in I Corinthians 3:2 as he deals with the divisions that had cropped up in the church in Corinth.

“I could not address you as spiritual,” he says, “but as worldly—mere infants in Christ. I gave you milk, not solid food, for you were not yet ready for it.” (I Corinthians 3:2)

The writer of Hebrews weighs in on spiritual immaturity as well. Hebrews 5:11-14 has this to say, *“We have much to say to you, but it is hard to explain because you are slow to learn. In fact, by this time you ought to be teachers, you need someone to teach you the elementary truths of God’s word all over again. You need milk, not solid food. Anyone who lives on milk, being still an infant is not acquainted with the teaching about righteousness.” (Hebrews 5:11-14)*

Encouraged to Grow in Christ

Paul talks about much the same thing in Ephesians 4:14-16. Just earlier, Paul writes about the importance of huddling up. He is all about church unity. When we attend to the unity of Christ’s body, a premium is put on growing in Christ and because of that spiritual immaturity is less prevalent.

When people are encouraged to grow in Christ, they hold one another accountable to nurture their relationship with Jesus. I pray we are holding one another accountable to *“seek first the Kingdom of God and his righteousness”* as a matter of first order.

I pray we are encouraging one another to stand strong in the midst of the prevailing winds of the world that blow so strongly around us. Paul asserts in Ephesians 4 that growing in Christ will make us far less susceptible to those prevailing winds. We will cease being *“blown here and there by every wind of teaching and by the cunning and craftiness of men in their deceitful scheming.”*

We will *“no longer be infants, tossed back and forth by the waves.”* We will cease being like an empty bottle cast about on the waves of an ever-changing culture.

A Culture without a Compass

When it comes to the present day, it is as if we are a culture without a compass. That’s all the more reason to be concerned about our spiritual growth and maturity. It seems that society as a whole is more into political correctness than Truth. Public opinion polls have more sway than the authority of God’s word. Everything is okay these days as long as it doesn’t hurt somebody else, and sometimes even that doesn’t matter. If everything is okay, then it stands to reason that nothing is ever wrong.

I have always been challenged by what Isaiah writes in Isaiah 5:20. *“Woe to those who call evil good and good evil, who put darkness for light and light for darkness, who put bitter for sweet and sweet for bitter.” (Isaiah 5:20)*

Moving beyond Spiritual Infancy

Somewhere in our walk with Christ we need to move off of the milk of the gospel and move onto solid food. When it comes to our walk with Christ there is always more. There is always something new to learn. There is always some new experience to share. It is inexcusable to profess faith in Christ and never move beyond infancy. God’s every desire is for us to be mature in the faith.

We Methodists talk about *“going on to perfection.”* John Wesley called it *“Christian Perfection”* or *“Scriptural Holiness.”* In fact, this *“going on to perfection,”* for me, is a matter of becoming more and more like Jesus. I ask myself all the time, *“Am I different today than I was yesterday?”* Am I *“going on”* to be the sort of person Christ wants me to be?

That sort of thing never takes place unless we pursue the solid food of the gospel—to where we are:

- Studying God’s Word dutifully.
- Praying for God’s will fervently.
- Serving in God’s name humbly.
- Giving to God’s Kingdom generously.
- And sharing God’s love regularly.

You’ve Got to “Want To”

You’ve got to “*want to*” when it comes to these things.

I have known persons who have just given their hearts to the Lord and can’t get enough. I have also known others who have professed faith for years, but seem to be no different in their walk from one year to the next.

Shirley Conran in her book *Savages* says in regard to spiritual growth, “*We are never too old to grow up.*”

David Breese in his book *Living for Eternity* asserts that “*those who are strong in the Lord are not perfected by childish pursuits.*”

Eugene Peterson puts things this way in paraphrasing I Timothy 4:7, “*Exercise daily in God—no spiritual flabbiness, please! Workouts in the gymnasium are useful, but a disciplined life in God is far more so, making you fit both for today and forever.*” (I Timothy 4:7 MSG)

The story is told of a little boy who fell out of bed in the middle of the night. When his mother rushed to the room to ask him what happened he said, “*Mommy, I don’t know. I guess I stayed too close to where I got in.*”

I pray that is not said of us when it comes to our spiritual lives—that “*we stay too close to where we got in.*” I challenge you to move on in your spiritual journey from where you are to where God wants you to be by:

- Reading God’s Word.
- Trusting God’s will.
- Obeying God’s commands.
- And reflecting God’s character.

By so doing, you will not only mature spiritually, but in every area of your life. That’s just the way it is for those who want to be mature in Christ.

In a word, it’s about time to grow up in him who loves us so much.