

**Homily, St. Andrew's
Proper 12C, June 19, 2016
Galatians 3:23-29**

Let us pray: May the words of my mouth and the meditations of all our hearts be ever more acceptable in your sight, O Lord, our Rock and our Redeemer.

It has been said that “Growing old is mandatory; growing up is optional.” (C Bryant) It’s a sentiment that I see expressed on Facebook and in other ways in a culture that highly values youth and youthfulness. In the grand scheme of history, though, adolescence is a relatively new invention. It was a distinct, new creation in the last century, with “teenager” becoming a word around the 1930’s. Over the past century, the time between childhood and adulthood has been steadily increasing. According to the research we heard about at our recent clergy conference, “Builders”, those over 70 years old, had perhaps 3 years of adolescence while Millennials, those aged roughly 16 to 35 years today, are expected to have 11 to 15 years between childhood and adulthood. Indeed, the concept of “emerging adulthood” is now being invented as a way of naming this extended process of “growing up.” We also see it as the noun “adult” has been slowly becoming a verb, with people saying things like: “I can’t ‘adult’ today”; or, “I’ve done a lot of ‘adulthood’ this weekend.” In general, such expressions seem to name the activities involved in being responsible for one’s own life... chores like laundry and taxes.

Many factors influence this broad sociological trend, including economics and educational expectations, but for today, the basic point is that more and more, there is a significant delay in growing up and becoming an adult. More, there can be a resistance to growing older that dates back at least to the 1960’s. For instance, I recently had a colleague say that he found it embarrassing to turn 60. We’re somehow not supposed to age even when it is a universal experience. Our cultural obsession with youth may be something we joke about with expressions like “growing up is optional”, but it becomes dangerous when we resist practicing, or worse, never learn, what it is to be grown up. That same research presented at clergy conference said that one of the key factors in an ideal culture is having adults whose identities are secure. In other words, what we need to function well in the church and in the world, are grown-ups.

In today’s reading from Paul’s letter to the Galatians, we hear the growing up process used as a metaphor to describe the Law’s function. Paul wrote this letter to a community that he feared was being led astray by rival “Missionaries” who insisted that at least some of the Jewish Law, most notably circumcision, had to be practiced to be part of the emerging Christian community. After building a case for the integrity and authority of his own proclamation, Paul turns in chapter 3 to building arguments against the teachings of his opponents. He “begins with an appeal to the Galatians’ experience of the Spirit (3:1-5) and then turns to a complicated exegetical argument (3:6-29), seeking to show that Scripture defines ‘Abraham’s offspring’ in a way very different from what the Missionaries have claimed.” (NIB, 249) To make his case, Paul develops “an account of the relation between Law and faith (vv 10-14), between Law and promise (vv 15-18), and [finally] the role of the Law within God’s design to bring rectification only through Christ (vv 19-25).” (NIB, 255) Today we hear the end of this last part of his argument with the use of a metaphor drawing on part of the growing up process in the Greco-

Roman world.

“The law,” Paul writes, “was our disciplinarian...” The Greek word translated here as “disciplinarian” literally means “child-leader” and “was a slave in the Greco-Roman household who supervised and guarded children.” This person “was not a member of the family, and when the child grew to a certain age, his services were no longer required.” Paul uses this metaphor to describe the function of the Law, which was important at one time to guard and protect the faithful, but its role had now come to an end. (NIB, 269) With Christ’s coming, it is our faith in Christ - in Christ’s faithful death and resurrection - that makes us part of God’s covenant and the family of Abraham.

The irony is that as Paul continues, bringing his argument to a close, he names us children - children of God - through faith in Christ Jesus and by virtue of our baptism. It is, perhaps, what Paul Ricoeur named the second naiveté. That is an approach to faith that is informed by the break-down of the childish ideas and beliefs of the first naiveté, the critical distance that follows, and then the struggle to re-build what was lost. What emerges on the other side, the second naiveté, is not like the first... it is not a return to the same childishness, but rather it includes taking personal responsibility for our beliefs, including perhaps more nuanced approaches to faith and finding greater and deeper meaning in religious beliefs and doctrines than what a child first apprehends. The second naiveté is a more grown up faith in which we are still, or rather we again understand ourselves to be, children of God.

Paul then arrives at the full implication of his argument with the transformation that comes with faith in Christ: “There is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male and female; for all of you are one in Christ Jesus. And if you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham’s offspring, heirs according to the promise.” The transformation that comes with faith in Christ includes the abolition of social distinctions that divide the people of God. Distinctions based on ethnicity, social class and gender no longer hold sway.

It’s important to note that Paul’s vision is specifically for the church as a new creation and a transformed community. This new and transformed community of the church is imagined as a precursor to the end of time when God’s rule will come in all its fullness and as a sign of that kingdom, God’s kingdom, already come... already and not yet. It “does not mean,” as one writer describes, “that those who are in Christ cease to be men or women, any more than the male members of the community cease to be circumcised or uncircumcised. Rather, it means that these distinctions are no longer the determinative identity markers, no longer a ground for status or exclusion.” (NIB, 273)

Last Sunday we met together as the community of faith to share our beliefs, our Christian commitments and our experiences as they relate to lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgendered and questioning people. In the process, with the presence and guidance of the Holy Spirit, we grew up as a community, just a little bit more. This growing up is not a result of the outcome of the vote, but rather it is in the process itself. Several people stood up to speak from their hearts and from their heads, personally, with compassion and honesty, with integrity and respect. There was no name-calling; there was no hate or malice; there was no threatening or ultimatums... in a word, there was no childishness. We were, rather, adults taking responsibility for ourselves - for our beliefs and commitments and experiences - and for our part in this community of the faithful. If there was a breaking of a naiveté in the community, it was in the realization that we are not unanimous. We are not all the same. And the next phase of our growth in the Spirit is in living

into our differences and loving one another through them; in spite of them; because of them. The call of Paul today is to continue to grow up, a little day by day, by each of us living into our individual identities as the adults we are, owning who we are as children of God and as valuable members of the community of Christ. In doing so, we witness to world of God's power to bring unity in diversity. There is no longer for or against, for we are one in Christ Jesus.

You will see in the announcements today, a note about the Five Marks of Mission. These statements, these benchmarks or goals, form an accepted summary of the church's purpose throughout the Anglican Communion and beyond. Over the next several months, we will explore these marks as a way of understanding and deepening our practice of ministry. What does it mean to be a church in mission? What is the mission of God, here in NW Calgary in 2016 and how can we participate in it? How are we already practicing these Marks and where do we need to further challenge ourselves? I hope that in the process of our exploration of these Five Marks of Mission, we will hear from a wide variety of people... personally, with compassion and honesty, with integrity and respect... about our most dearly held beliefs, Christian commitments and experience.

With our meeting last week, we are well on our way. The first Mark is to proclaim the Good News of the Kingdom. We are doing that both by fully including the presence and relationships of LGBTQ people, and by fully including those who disagree with that decision. We are proclaiming the Kingdom of God by loving those with whom we disagree. It is a witness sorely needed in our world. With the terrible events in Orlando, and the killing of Jo Cox in England last week, the need... our need... the world's need... for the reign of God, the reign of love, to come is undeniable. With our grown up faith and by the example of our unity in our diversity, may our proclamation of God's power to love be heard by people near and far, within the church and beyond. May God's kingdom come as the distinctions that once divided us, make us even stronger, together in Christ.