

All Saints Sunday
God's Children Grow

November 5, 2023
1 John 3:1-3

We are God's children. Our Second Reading declares: "See what love the Father has given us, that we should be called children of God, **and that is what we are.**" Every one of you is a child of God. God adopted each one of you at your baptisms. You are children of God. That's who you are. Since you are connected to the holy God, you are also God's holy people. You are saints.

It's been said that there are no adults of God. We always remain children of God. That is true. However, our Second Reading also suggests that God's children are to grow. We don't remain infants or toddlers of God. This letter says: "Beloved, we are God's children now; what we will be has not yet been revealed." We are God's children right now; and, we don't yet know what we will become. We are becoming something more. I see this as saying: God's children grow. That's something all living things seem to do.

We grow as human beings. We get taller and heavier. It usually means becoming more mature, more responsible, more independent. Becoming mature also means being able to reproduce – and I'll say more about this later.

What does it mean for us as God's children to grow? What does it mean to mature in your Christian faith and life? I think that it is similar to maturing in our human lives.

First of all, it should happen naturally. When infants are properly cared for, receiving proper nutrition, proper guidance and love, proper instructions, they naturally turn into grown up adults – and they will usually act as mature adults. When the proper nurturing doesn't happen, their growth towards maturity may be stunted, or, at the worst, the lack of care can result in the death of the infant.

When young Christians are properly cared for, when they receive often the proper nutrition of Jesus body and blood in the bread and wine, when they are given proper guidance and love from the community of the Christian church, when they receive proper instructions through God's Word; they naturally turn into mature Christians. When the proper Christian nurturing doesn't happen, their growth towards maturity of faith may be stunted, or, at the worst, the lack of Christian care might result in the death of the faith God has given.

Secondly, there are indications when a person has matured. Biologically, our bodies go through transformations. Intellectually, we keep learning more and more. That's why the elderly can have troubles remembering stuff – there's so much information in their heads, it takes time to find the right stuff – like all the things stuffed in a junk drawer. Mature Christians know more about their faith than immature ones.

Socially, mature people are responsible for their own actions. We move from being fed, to feeding ourselves, to preparing our own meals. We move from having someone change our diapers, to washing our own clothes. We move from nonsensical sounds to intelligent sentences. We move from someone else taking care of us to taking care of ourselves. We making our own decisions. We are responsible for our decisions – some will be good and some will not be so good.

This text ends by stating: "And all who have this hope in him purify themselves, just as he is pure." Originally, these words for "purify" and "pure" referred to rituals that made someone or something fit for use in the worship of God. They are ideas closely related to the word for "saint" which more literally is, "holy ones." The same word is used in reference to the "Holy Spirit" or "Holy Communion" or "Holy Scriptures."

The word refers to something or someone that had been set apart for use in the worship of God. The opposite of “holy” in the Bible is “common” or “ordinary.” Common and ordinary things were used for everyday events. Holy or sanctified or purified things were set apart for divine events – like the worship of God and rituals in the temple.

This text says this about us: “The reason the world does not know us is that it did not know him.” We are not to be common and ordinary people. Being children of God, being saints, being holy ones, being set apart, being purified, being Christians, means that we are not like everyone else.

As we grow in our faith, we learn ways we are to be unique; different from the people of the world. The fruit of the Spirit is manifested in our lives: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control.

We are also told that we will be like him when he appears. Growing in our faith means becoming more like Jesus. Although, I certainly hope that I am not crucified like he was; or executed because of being too different like many of the early believers were. We are forgiving, merciful, accepting others while proclaiming the truth of God – characteristics of Jesus’ holy life on earth.

Mature people can reproduce – it doesn’t mean that they all will, but they usually can. I warned you that more about this was coming.

In the past, congregations usually grew because enough of their members had enough children who stayed in the area to populate the congregation. That is not what I mean by the ability to reproduce. Besides, that process isn’t working too well any more.

What I mean by the ability to reproduce is to bring the unchurched and the unbelievers into the church; bring them to the love of God who adopts them as God’s own children. God’s family grows.

According to a 2020 survey I read this week, 56% of the people in Whatcom County are not connected to any religious organization. More than half of the population of our county do not go to church or a synagogue or a temple. The harvest is plentiful, as Jesus said.

These unchurched people need Christians who are mature enough to reproduce their faith. This means knowing enough Christian theology in our heads so that we can talk reasonably and intelligently about our faith to anyone. This means having enough Christian love in our hearts so that we **want** to share the good news with others. This means having enough Christian commitment in our lives so that others will see a difference in the way we act; and hear a difference in the way we speak. We aren’t common and ordinary people. We are saints – God’s children. I need to also add, we shouldn’t be jerks about being saints either. I’ve met some Christians who seemed more like jerks than like Jesus.

Our faith, our relationship with God is not something we earned. It is a gift – given to us by God – over and over again as we fail to live as God’s children; as we fail to represent our loving God in this sinful world; as we fail to be lights shining in the dark world.

Very few Lutherans are at this level of maturity in their faith. Many don’t want to grow up to this level. “I learned everything I need to know in Sunday school,” I’ve heard some say. Another man told me that he had enough church as a child – being forced to attend every week. His wife came to church, but he didn’t. Such a person has stopped his Christian growth.

Until we become as purified as Christ was pure, we need to continue our growth and maturity in our Christian faith and life – to become more receptive to God’s guiding in our lives

and less guided by what others think; so that we will be uncommon people in the world. We will fail to live as pure lives as we should. Our mistakes do not change the fact that we are children of God.

When our children misbehaved, we still loved them, accepted them, and tried to guide them to better ways of behaving. God does the same with us. Granted, we never remove the sin from our lives, but God keeps working in and through us.

It is the love of God that makes us children of God. It is the Word of God that declares us blessed. It is the Holy Spirit of God who makes us “holy ones” or saints. When our faith is fed by these means, we are like a healthy plant that naturally grows and bears fruit. We have been blessed by God so that we might bring God’s blessings to others.