

Growing Up

II Samuel 11:26-12;13a; Ephesians 4:1-16; John 6:24-35; Psalm 51:1-12; 8-06-06

Have you ever heard the expression “Marry in haste, repent at leisure?” It is a warning issued to those of us who tend to think with our hearts and passions instead of with our logic. It applies to other areas of life as well as to marriage and cautions that we should not make snap decisions about many things. When we are young and foolish we tend to make decisions with little to no thought for future consequences. As we mature or, grow up, some of life’s experiences may show us the folly of our earlier ways.

We enter the story of King David this morning at this point. David had seen Bathsheba bathing on a rooftop and, overcome with passion, and without much thought, he had sent for her and as the Bible says, “lay with her.” Of course, to complicate matters, she had conceived and was pregnant. David, still in some kind of fog, decided that the best course of action would be to have her husband, Uriah, put in the front line of battle so that he would be killed and David could claim Bathsheba as his own. This was accomplished and was not pleasing to God. So, in this morning’s reading, the prophet Nathan brought him an important message and hoped that he would understand it. David, being no dummy, eventually did. He repented, but a bit too late.

Now, let me make myself perfectly clear. There are times in life when a hasty decision is better than no decision at all. There are times when we can think something or some action to death and we miss wonderful chances at life. There are those other times when making a decision too quickly can lead to sorrow and pain but we cannot be so cautious in life that we are afraid to fail. Through those things that fail we can make enormous growth into a new awareness of life and a new maturity. If we will not venture forth into new relationships, new jobs, new worlds, we become stale, predictable and boring not to mention afraid of our own shadows.

In David’s case, the death of his and Bathsheba’s child was a difficult lesson to learn. It was a major failure, but we can be sure David learned something from the consequences of his thoughtless action. This is not to say that he went on through life making no mistakes. But he grew up a bit and learned how to adapt and adjust to life and its demands upon him as king.

In the Gospel of John Jesus was telling those 5000 he had fed that they needed to grow up a bit and stop seeking just their daily bread. They needed to stop living from one physical meal to the next and, instead, seek the bread of life that would nourish and satisfy them forever. He was the bearer of that bread and, through the message he sought to share, they would learn to mature and serve God in better ways. His mission was to bring forth the kingdom of God on this earth and he desired everyone who heard his words to join in this effort. To sustain them on their journey with him, they needed to develop a spiritual side to their nature and stop following him just for the free lunch they thought he would provide. As we all know, there is no such thing as “a free lunch.” In the case of Jesus, the cost of discipleship was and is very high. It demands much of us, it asks that we leave our old, familiar way of life to take up the new.

And in the Letter to the Ephesians we read about the qualities that were inherent in a real grown up person who practices a real grown up faith. The author of this letter, some think Paul, some prefer to think it was one of his disciples, stresses the importance of setting aside childish ways that allow us to be taken in by things that are not true and that seek to tear apart the kingdom rather than build it up. As always, love for God and for our fellow humans is the guiding and directing principle. It is the underlying factor.

This is not just the essential truth in our Christian way of thinking but it is predominant in other religious systems, also. Eventually, we can only hope and pray that people of wisdom will manage to cut to this base of truth that exists for all people and find a way to peace around this troubled globe of ours.

John Shelby Spong noted in a speech delivered at Hartford Seminary a while ago that when all religions manage to sit down and discover the pearl of great price each of them possesses and when they carry these great pearls to a meeting of all religions, then and only then would true

commonality of life and peace be discovered. He believes that the essence of this commonality and of most of our world religions is love.

Who among us can resist love? No one if they are mature. A truly loving and caring spirit does not look only to its own needs and desires. We remain childish if we always are the one and only focus in our lives; if the self is all that matters to the exclusion of the needs of others. Through a selfish love we construct barriers that keep us safe from others. A truly loving spirit tries to break down all the walls we build between us. It pokes its fingers through the little spaces in those walls and persists in reaching out and reaching forward. It persists until it reaches what has been broken and injured and angered and withdrawn. By its tender touch, things are mended and made whole again. When our fingers become a true extension of God's in making the world a better and richer place for all people we will know what growing up into our faith is all about.

And, that was what Jesus was all about. He was about providing the bread for the journey into the kingdom of God. A kingdom based on forgiveness for those of us who may act like David from time to time, on forbearance of one another during those truly sticky times when it would be far easier to turn our backs and walk away, and on the greatest of all these, love. Amen