

“When I Became an Adult”

1 Corinthians 13
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June 5, 2016

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Everyone knows about Paul’s famous love letter to the Corinthians: “Love is patient and kind, not jealous or boastful...” But today, I am focused on a later portion of that letter where Paul says to the church, to their Confirmation class, to everyone there: “When I became an adult, I put an end to childish ways.”

On Confirmation Sunday, the faith community reflects on what it means to be an adult. So, I’ve tried to look back on my own journey to adulthood. And I see that becoming an adult is a long process. Some would argue we are constantly in a state of becoming adults; always more maturing to accomplish.

One of the great coming of age stories in the Bible is the account of Cain and Abel. Basically, this is a story about how one reacts when life isn’t fair. Abel’s offering to God is accepted and Cain’s is not. No explanation is offered. In that moment, Cain concludes that life isn’t fair. He loses his temper, becomes enraged, storms off into the field, and kills his brother. I would say that Cain had some growing up to do; figuring out how to handle it when life isn’t fair. To be an adult is to be committed to finding ways to express anger without hurting anyone. This is what love hopes for; not that we’ll never be angry, but that we’ll find ways to express it such that a relationship actually deepens. I’d like to believe Cain could have found his brother out in the field, invited him to share some lemonade, expressed his disappointment at life’s unfairness, listened to what Abel might have had to say; and maybe ended up getting a much-needed hug from his brother. I picture them walking off arm-in-arm, into the sunset.

Becoming an adult has to do with the astounding discovery that it's not all about me. It came as a grand aha moment when scientists helped humanity to understand that the universe does not revolve around the earth! It's an equally aha moment to ponder the whole of Creation and to come to one's senses, realizing it is God who is the center of the universe and not I. That is an adult moment.

In the Book of Luke, we have the story of Jesus at the age of Confirmation! He and his parents had come up to Jerusalem for the weekend, and as they were journeying back home, Mary and Joseph realized their son was not with them! They panicked! They ran all the way back to the City looking for him. They looked everywhere: in all the video game stores, in the baseball card shops, at the YMCA gymnasium, at the candy shop, and maybe the music store. In desperation, they checked out the local synagogue. And, there he was, much to their surprise! He says to them, "Didn't you know where I'd be?" What he was really saying was, 'Once I discovered it's not all about me, I had a ton of questions that couldn't wait.' Questions like: What does it really mean to love God with all my heart and all my soul and all my strength? What does it mean to love my neighbor? What does it really mean to love?

Once you make this discovery, adulthood sets in! I got my first real, for pay, job after my junior year in high school. I was a junior counselor at a camp for boys in Fitzwilliam, New Hampshire. I went charging up there to be the head tennis instructor. I was going to make the outrageous salary of \$75 for the two months of camp. I was on top of the world. It was all about me. But when I arrived, I was assigned to a tent group of 5th grade boys. They were all so needy it hurt. They were starved for love and attention and affirmation. Within the first 24 hours, I saw that it wasn't about me at all; it was about the children I had come to serve. I don't know if anyone else noticed, but inside my heart I knew I had taken a giant step toward being an adult.

South Church is in need of adults; men and women who understand that love requires us to step aside sometimes, so that other lives can blossom and flourish and find their purpose. Today, God is smiling on twenty sophomores who are ready to be known as adults among us.

Sooner or later, you'll be playing Trivial Pursuit, and the question will be: what's the shortest verse in the Bible? And, of course, you'll know it: Jesus wept. Two words. John 11, verse 35, Revised Standard Edition. You'll astonish your friends with your Bible Knowledge.

I lift up this verse because it offers us another hint about becoming an adult. Adults are not afraid of their tears. Adults are not embarrassed by their tears. Adults don't have to apologize for their tears. Adults understand that their tears, their raw emotions, are gifts from God. Our tears connect us to our souls. Our tears are our best reminder that we are alive; that we have loved and that we have been loved. Jesus wept because his close friend, Lazarus, had died. We weep for all kinds of reasons. I rarely leave the house without a hanky in my pocket, sort of hoping that something will happen each day to provoke my tears. It's kind of a bummer if my hanky remains neatly folded all day long.

In our culture, we don't tend to give permission for people to cry. It makes us uneasy. We don't know what to say. We are big on control, and tears are a sign of being out of control. If Paul's Love Letter to the Corinthians means anything at all, it means that within an adult church community there is room for tears.

As a boy, before there were New England Patriots, I cheered for the New York Giants. I knew all their names and all their statistics. Charlie Connerly played quarterback; Frank Gifford was halfback; Roosevelt Brown and Roosevelt Grier beefed up the interior line. The two Roosevelts were enormous human beings. They were rough and they were tough. They formed the heart of what was known as the goal line stand unit. Other players were big, but these two were giants. Years later, as a young dad, I sat with my son and watched Sesame Street. One day, there was a guest, Roosevelt Grier, the interior lineman from my childhood.

Strumming his guitar, he began to sing, "It's Alright to Cry." It was clear to me then that he was more than a professional football player; he was an adult.

The Apostle Paul said, "When I became an adult, I put away childish things." This work of becoming an adult in a faith community is as challenging as anything else in life. It means finding a righteous way to handle anger when life isn't fair. It means letting go of the notion that it's all about me. It means honoring all the emotions God has placed within our hearts. It's when we choose to be adults that we realize we are living in the greatest of hope! Amen.