

**“Maturing Faith”**  
**Sermon on Sunday, August 1, 2021**

**Dear church,**

“You’re being immature!” Maybe you remember making that statement, directed at one of your teenage children at some point. If your memory is most excellent, you may even remember your own parents judging your behavior in a similar way when you grew up. Let me say this: it’s good for us to be immature at certain points in our lives. Yes, it is good for us! Kids who are seemingly born mature and perfectly behaved often miss a crucial part of human development; they may suppress feelings and urges more than is good for them and miss the opportunity to grow from their mistakes. Is it not perfectly normal for 15 or 16 years old teenagers to show a lack of judgment every once in a while? Now, if we are talking about people in their 50’s trying to impress peers with juvenile behavior, we will feel a little bit different about that. But in the course of life we all go through some maturing.

In the New Testament, the topic of maturing is broached a number of times. In the letters of John, readers are frequently addressed as “little children,” even though they are adults. I have never been able to decide whether the expression is an act of patronizing or just tender love. In any case it indicates that the community was in the early stages of growing up spiritually. Six times the expression “little children” appears in the first letter of John. In Paul’s writings we sometimes come across a certain frustration on the part of the apostle that his churches are not further along in their understanding of the gospel. At one point he fumes that the church in Corinth isn’t ready yet for solid food, just milk. In today’s text from Ephesians 4, Paul is more hopeful, envisioning a church that is both mature and unified. There is work for all of us to do, Paul says, *“until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ.”*

As I pondered these passages, I wondered how in fact our faith matures. How do we grow up spiritually? If we take the only analogy we know well, the maturing that occurs through childhood, youth and adolescence in our personal development, then the maturing of our faith won’t be a smooth process. A lot of people believe that you must preserve your childhood faith as well as can be, protect it from the evil influences of the world and keep it forever. And they never mature! Because that’s not what growing up is all about. If I remember correctly, growing up was about questioning and yes,

sometimes fighting with the authority figures. It was about finding your own unique voice. How could it be any different in our spiritual lives? The person who questions God, who wonders what is true and what holds water, that person has a true chance to grow, even if it's not always a smooth and easy process. There may be questions and doubts that linger for years, causing discomfort, but that's better than the safety that comes paired with the fear of losing your spiritual childhood virginity. As Martin Luther teaches us through his own life story, faith grows by asking questions. True faith evolves and changes perspectives. In the end, it will lead to trust rather than rock-solid forever answers. How deep is our trust in Christ? How deep is our connection with the creator?

Enter the gospel story for this Sunday, Jesus walking on water, not on the rock-solid laws and formulas of his Jewish childhood. I must confess to you that throughout my life I have always had doubts about the literal dimension of this story. I mean, can you picture anyone walking on a lake? Yet, the older I get, and I just turned 54, the more I become comfortable with the metaphor that is offered to us in some of these spectacular miracle stories. On the metaphoric level, this makes total sense. Sometimes we walk on water!!! We don't feel that the ground underneath our feet is solid. We walk by faith, trusting that God will lead us out of a dark period or a pandemic or a problem we simply can't fix. It's uncomfortable and sometimes much more than that. And yet, maturing faith does not need solid doctrinal ground under its feet all of the time; more than anything it evolves out of every step we take in faith during those days and nights of uncertainty. And somewhere out in the fog we hear the voice of Jesus: "It is I. Do not be afraid!"

Trust. It was the first thing we learned as babies and toddlers when we allowed our parents to teach us walking. It is also the most foundational experience we need to learn in our journey of faith. To trust the invisible hand that holds us and that will eventually let go of us so that we can walk on our own and even run and find our way. Imagine that whatever plagues you right now is one giant lake and you need to cross this body of water, trusting in God. It's how faith is formed, how trust is built, how people become resilient and how churches become strong. Trust. And taking one step at a time. "It is I" is there. Near you. We walk in the presence of God.

**Amen.**