**PREACHING NOTES: GROWING UP**

**Sunday, 12 November 2017**

*(Simon Nunn)*

**Q. What Church does Jesus want?**

**A. Outward Looking;**

 **Inward Strengthening.**

**Object**: to guide the congregation into seeing that growth and multiplication is as necessary and fundamental in the spiritual as in the natural kingdom, that God wants a fruitful and mature people, turning from "fed" into "feeders", characterised by Unity and Devotion, to the Glory of God.

**Introduction**:

Growth is a key principle of life. We love babies, small children. But they don't stay that way! They grow and multiply:

 ***NUNN FAMILY PICTURES***

And as they grow, they change:

***"When I was a child, I talked like a child, I thought like a child, I reasoned like a child. When I became a man I put childish ways behind me. (1 Corinthians 13:11)***

Illustrations of (a) ***Kaitlyn and CBeebies***: now she's 9 she's affronted by being offered CBeebies as her TV viewing, (b) ***Olly and his childhood toy Percy Puffin***: discarded once he'd met Amanda!

If they didn't change, we'd be concerned:

***Richard's potted chrysanthemum***. It stayed alive, but because it was in too small a pot and wasn't fed, it only survived.

There is physical growing up, and there is also *emotional*, *moral*, *intellectual*, and *spiritual* growing up: remembering the centenary of the ending of the Battle of Passchendaele, reminder of how teenage boys were thrust into the horrors of battle, what they suffered, and the agonies of bereavement they left behind. A very rapid and painful process of growing up, that our generation cannot begin to understand.

***PICTURES OF Passchendaele***

**What Does the Bible Say about Growing Up?**

It speaks of *physical* and *emotional* development in the *relational sphere*.

***"At the beginning the Creator made them male and female, and said 'For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh'? So they are no longer two but one." (Matthew 19:5, quoting Genesis 1:27 / 2:24. Also quoted Ephesians 5:31)***

For all of us, there should be a time of "leaving and cleaving". A time to leave our parents' home and establish new soul relationships. And to move out from our parents' control to establish a new identity of our own. That is as important in the church as in the secular sphere. (It does not mean any loss of love and respect with our parents; on the contrary it should strengthen the relationship. As Kipling said, "Daughter am I in my mother's home, but mistress in my own.")

What about our *spiritual* development?

***"Like newborn babies, crave pure spiritual milk, so that by it you may grow up in your salvation, now that you have tasted that the Lord is good." (1 Peter 2:2-3)***

***"It was he who gave some to be apostles, some to be prophets, some to be evangelists and some to be pastors and teachers, to prepare God's people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up 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 fulness of Christ.***

***Then we will no longer be infants, tossed back and forth by the waves, and blown here and there by every wind of teaching, and by the cunning and craftiness of men in their deceitful scheming. Instead, speaking the truth in love, we will in all things grow up into Him who is the Head, that is, Christ. From him the whole body, joined and held together by every supporting ligament, grows and builds itself up in love, as each part does its work." (Ephesians 4:11-16)***

As individuals, as we grow up into Christ, the whole body attains unity, building itself up in love, *speaking the truth*, *as each part does its work*.

A disunited, grumbling, take-it-or-leave-it, that's-someone-else's-problem, people are not mature, and cannot lead to a mature, fruitful, Spirit-filled church.

Babies have personalities, but they are needs focussed. Their sole interest is personal comfort and satisfaction of their wants, whether for food, affection, amusement. Small children squabble over toys, have to learn how to share, how to start taking personal responsibility for their actions. Sadly, people in the church sometimes behave as though what they do or don't do has any effect for everyone else - or perhaps they don't even care?

***PICTURES OF BIRDS***

***- being fed***

***- growing, overcrowding the nest***

***- learning to fly, even being kicked out of the nest***

***- still being supported by their parents***

***- but a time to have families of their own***

***- and to be the feeder, rather than the fed.***

Why do some Christians not mature? The Parable of the Sower explains much:

* Shallow soil. Initial enthusiasm, but don't last beyond the honeymoon period. May continue to go through the motions for appearances' sake, but no real roots in Christ, no real sense of the necessity for, and wonder of, their salvation. Not fed - like Richard's chrysanthemum.
* Choked by thorns and weeds:

***"The seed that fell among thorns stands for those who, but as they go on their way they are choked by life's worries, riches and pleasures, and they do not mature." (Luke 8:14).***

***"If you do not drive out the inhabitants of the land, those you allow to remain will become barbs in your eyes and thorns in your sides. They will give you trouble in the land where you will live." (Numbers 33:55)***

What are those thorns and weeds?

* + the regular distractions of life, centred around issues of time, money, energy. Too much going on, too many things to worry about. What gets squeezed? Too often it's our Christian walk, our commitment to the Church programme.
	+ things that we harbour and nurse in our minds: insecurities, grievances. These really eat into our spiritual wellbeing, because too often we try to compartmentalise our minds such that we try and pretend to be living a happy and well-balanced Christian life, when in reality we're all churned up inside. We find it difficult to confront the reality of these issues, to confess them to God, and seek His release for them. We may deceive others, we may deceive ourselves, but we can never deceive God.
	+ other things that stop us wanting to leave the nest:
		- fear of where following God might take us personally, what it might do for our lives, our relationships with family and friends.
		- living under the shadow of others - "I've always looked to so-and-so, and they said ...."; people who we allow to manipulate us, preventing us growing into the adults or adult behaviours that is God's natural order for us. Perversely, we sometimes welcome this control, because it saves us from having to make difficult decisions, enter into commitments, to be accountable for ourselves.
		- inertia! We've always done it this way, so we're not going to change.
		- we like being given the attention of others coming to look after us, even perhaps being seen as one of life's "victims".

In other words, we have to take stock, decide our priorities, and instil discipline into our spiritual lives, if we want to mature.

But why should we want to mature? Quite simply, to be obedient to Jesus' command:

***"Go and make disciples of all nations, baptising them in the name of the Father and of the son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you." (Matthew 28:19-20)***

We can't "go and teach" if we're staying comfortably at home, making only token appearances at church. Jesus warns us against the man who was given a talent, but put it to no profitable use (Matthew 25:24). In our Christian faith we have to step out, go beyond our comfort zones. Church is a mission field.

***"'Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.' How, then, can they call on the one they have not believed in? And how can they believe in the one of whom they have not heard? And how can they hear without someone preaching to them? And how can they preach unless they are sent?" (Romans 10:13-15)***

***"Though by this time you ought to be teachers, you need someone to teach you the elementary truths of God's word all over again. You need milk, not solid food! Anyone who lives on milk, being still an infant, is not acquainted with the teaching about righteousness. But solid food is for the mature, who by constant use have trained themselves to distinguish good from evil. Therefore let us leave the elementary teachings about Christ and go on to maturity ... (Hebrews 5:12-6:1)***

***"Brothers, stop thinking like children. In regard to evil be infants, but in your thinking be adults." (1 Corinthians 14.20)***

A mature person has *character*. Not about being "a character" - any eccentric behaviour can earn that name - but *strength of character*. Not stubborn, stroppy, selfish, difficult. But exhibiting *Christian character.*

***"In Christ, we who are many form one body, and each member belongs to all the others. We have different gifts, according to the grace given us. If a man's gift is prophesying, let him use it in proportion to his faith. If it is serving, let him serve; if it is teaching, let him teach; if it is encouraging, let him encourage; if it is contributing to the needs of others, let him give generously; if it is leadership, let him govern diligently; if it is showing mercy, let him do it cheerfully.***

***Love must be sincere. Hate what is evil; cling to what is good. Be devoted to one another in brotherly love. Honour one another above yourselves. Never be lacking in zeal, but keep your spiritual fervour, serving the Lord. Be joyful in hope, patient in affliction, faithful in prayer. Share with God's people who are in need. Practise hospitality." (Romans 12:5-13)***

Look at example of:

***EPAPHRAS: Colossians 1:6-7; 4:12-13.***

An obscure individual, tucked away in the pages of Scripture; but one whose characteristics are ones that I would love to be remembered for emulating!

***"And we pray this in order that you may live a life worthy of the Lord and may please him in every way: bearing fruit in every good work, growing in the knowledge of God, being strengthened with all power according to his glorious might so that you may have great endurance and patience, and joyfully giving thanks to the Father, who has qualified you to share in the inheritance of the saints in the kingdom of light." (Colossians 1.9-12)***

Finally, look at Dave & Becky Waterman - they have made an enormous life choice, to follow Christ into an area way outside their natural comfort zone. Let them be an example to us!!