

“All Growed Up”**Rev. Dr. Kimberly Heath**

Luke 9:28-43

Now about eight days after these sayings Jesus took with him Peter and John and James and went up on the mountain to pray. And while he was praying, the appearance of his face changed, and his clothes became as bright as a flash of lightning. Suddenly they saw two men, Moses and Elijah, talking to him. They appeared in glory and were speaking about his exodus, which he was about to fulfill in Jerusalem. Now Peter and his companions were weighed down with sleep, but as they awoke they saw his glory and the two men who stood with him. Just as they were leaving him, Peter said to Jesus, “Master, it is good for us to be here; let us set up three tents: one for you, one for Moses, and one for Elijah,” not realizing what he was saying. While he was saying this, a cloud came and overshadowed them, and they were terrified as they entered the cloud. Then from the cloud came a voice that said, “This is my Son, my Chosen; listen to him!” When the voice had spoken, Jesus was found alone. And they kept silent and in those days told no one any of the things they had seen.

On the next day, when they had come down from the mountain, a great crowd met him. Just then a man from the crowd shouted, “Teacher, I beg you to look at my son; he is my only child. Suddenly a spirit seizes him, and all at once he shrieks. It convulses him until he foams at the mouth; it mauls him and will scarcely leave him. I begged your disciples to cast it out, but they could not.” Jesus answered, “You faithless and perverse generation, how much longer must I be with you and put up with you? Bring your son here.” While he was being brought forward, the demon dashed him to the ground in convulsions. But Jesus rebuked the unclean spirit, healed the boy, and gave him back to his father. And all were astounded at the greatness of God.



It's not so new, but on social media there are frequently memes that turn being an adult into not just a state of being — but a verb.



We had a couple of weeks of a break with the snowstorm and our anniversary, but we have been doing a sermon series on the 12 Steps of AA. Remember how Bill Hayden described them? You can think of the 12 steps in four movements: Give up; Own up; Make up; Grow up. Or the way that I saw the movements as I was doing my doctoral studies: Aware, Repair, Renew.

Slightly different words, but the first couple of steps are about waking up to the mess or the pain that is in your life and giving up to your way of dealing with it. It's also about waking up and surrendering/giving in to a higher power, to God, who is present and able to bring you to sanity. The next movement that we talked about a few weeks ago is in that section of owning up— of confessing to ourselves and another and to a loving God where we have done wrong.

Now today I'm going to cheat and do what you can't do in life. I'm going to jump to the end. I'll come back to the middle, but right now I want to jump to the end because *Are we there yet??* I want to get there sooner but also because it fits liturgically. This is Transfiguration Sunday, the Sunday before Ash Wednesday when the journey of Lent begins.

Next week I will come back to the middle and talk about making amends and about forgiveness. But today I want to jump to the end and talk about a spiritual awakening and sharing that awakening with others.

Today we're going to talk about the growing up steps:

Step 11: Sought through prayer and meditation to improve our conscious contact with God as we understood God, praying only for knowledge of God's will for us and the power to carry that out.

Step 12: Having had a spiritual awakening as the result of these steps, we tried to carry this message to other alcoholics, and to practice these principles in all our affairs.

In the transfiguration story Jesus takes his closest followers, Peter, James and John, with him up a mountain. It likely happened at night because it mentions that the three disciples are weighed down by sleep. They nearly miss it, because they are having a hard time staying awake. This is almost a foreshadowing of the garden — the night Jesus was betrayed when he goes to the garden and prays that 'this cup' might be taken from him, and he asks the disciples to watch and pray. But those same disciples kept falling asleep. I can't help but wonder what they might have experienced or seen if they'd been able to stay awake. I've got huge sympathy for the disciples because unless it's part of my dreams, I'm going to miss every mystical experience scheduled after 9 pm!

But mercifully the disciples are awake enough to experience and catch a glimpse of Jesus in

glory. His face is changed — it's radiant— that's why they call it the *transfiguration*. And they see others there with him: the prophet Elijah and Moses. What were they seeing? They were seeing *what was*, *what is to be* and *what really is* now. They were seeing the kingdom of God, present and all around.

Wouldn't you love to have eyes that could see, ears that could hear? Wouldn't you love to always be aware of God's presence? I've never experienced anything quite like that, but I've had moments, glimpses of that presence ... and there is nothing like it. All fear is gone. I felt warmth, love, and total joy or release of pain through healing tears.

Naturally when they see this, they want to hold on to it. Peter talks about building houses for Moses and Elijah. He wants to make the experience permanent.

Richard Rohr, who has written a fair bit about the 12 steps, made an interesting observation about addiction: "*Addictions represent finite answers to infinite longings. But adding up the finite over and over will never equal the infinite.*" ¹

Peter wants to take something that is infinite and put it in a finite box.

Don't be too hard on Peter ... it's a human pattern. People with addictions may be trying to find and feel that infinite peace or freedom or joy or self-love that they feel for a moment when they use drugs or drink or buy that new sweater or have that late night half-tub of ice cream. The problem is that it doesn't last and the emptiness returns, so you need more and more.

Of course it's not just addicts. We all do it. In a way that's why we build churches, so that we can try to contain and hold onto that which is uncontainable.

Whenever we try to hold on to God, we are behaving like an addict. And yes — an institution, like the church, can be addicted. It's often addicted to tradition and not changing. A church can be addicted to its own way of doing things and it's own way of seeing the world.

Don't get me wrong. We need the church, and in places like Canada we need buildings to meet in and things like structures and governance to have things run smoothly. The thing is, we can *never confuse the container with the contents*. And we can't make our church like a fireproof safe that only certain people with the right combination lock can get into. In fact it's probably best if the container isn't all that strong... like maybe we should think of the church as a leaky bucket. (Ours is currently a bit of a leaky bucket as we battle snow melting and getting under the gym roof!) God seems to prefer to pour God's Spirit into broken and leaky people and churches.

¹ Richard Rohr Daily Meditation quoting Timothy McMahan King, *Addiction Nation: What the Opioid Crisis Reveals About Us* (Herald Press: 2019), 209. Wednesday, December 18, 2019

So how do you maintain a conscious contact if the presence of God can't be contained? It's exactly why you need to have a conscious contact — you need to stay connected.

The truth is if you want to maintain a conscious contact with God, you have to make it a priority. You have to choose. You have to make a commitment. You've got to climb a mountain and stay awake — or at least make an effort to connect with God. You do that by tuning into church every week. You do that when you listen to your favourite Christian playlist on your streaming service. You do that by turning off social media for 15 minutes and practicing meditation.

And

You keep it by giving it away! What do you need most for yourself? Do you need peace? Do you need a feeling of self-worth? Do you need justice? Do you need beauty or meaning? How do you gain or experience or continue to experience it? You have to give it away. Remember the leaky bucket? It leaks for a reason ... it leaks so others experience the love and the peace.

Nothing can be hoarded in God's kingdom. Remember that hoarding is also an addiction — I can't help but wonder if it's the most honest addiction — to want to possess and keep more and more.

The story of the transfiguration is interesting partly because there's a real "what goes up must come down" quality to it. Literally they go up a mountain and come back down, but they also experience a great high of being in the presence of God. But then they come down and are immediately met with the needs and suffering of the world. It's not easy coming down from the mountain. It's like they've gone from zero gravity to feeling extra g's —so much heaviness on earth.

Down in the valley, the father of a son who suffers seizures shoves through the crowd to get to Jesus and is desperately begging for help. He tried first with the disciples but they couldn't do it. Jesus responds with exasperation: *"You faithless and perverse generation, how much longer must I be with you and put up with you? Bring your son here."*

Sounds like someone needs a vacation! Is Jesus tired out and fed up with it all? Maybe—he is human after all. But if we were to read on in Luke, this story of the healing at the bottom of the mountain is one of four little vignettes where the disciples fail to measure up. They failed in faith, they failed in humility and they failed in compassion. So it's pretty clear that Jesus' exasperation is aimed at his disciples, not at the crowd or the father and his son or even ministry in general.

Jesus' journey to the cross is on the horizon — Jesus knows he is not alone, that God is with him powerfully, every step of the way — but down in the valley Jesus is shaking his head and thinking that his disciples are never going to get it, never going to be able to manage in the real world, never going to grow up.

Like many of you and so many around the world I have been praying for Pope Francis. He's been such a wonderful Pope. Some have described him as a 'shepherd who smells like the sheep'. In other words, though he is the head of the Roman Catholic Church and one of the (maybe even *the*) most influential people on earth, he does not consider himself better than others. He continues to care for the flock, especially the weakest. He is not afraid to correct people in places of power, particularly his own bishops and his own members who are abusing power. One of the things he did recently just before going into hospital was to admonish U.S. bishops for not speaking out strongly enough against the mass deportation of undocumented people in the U.S. He did this through a letter to the U.S. bishops. In the letter, without naming him directly, Pope Francis took a stab against VP JD Vance who spoke of and used a doctrine called *ordo amoris*, the "order of loves" to defend the mass deportation policy.

J. D. Vance, in a Fox News interview in January, described what he called "old school ... very Christian concept" that "you love your family, and then you love your neighbor, and then you love your community, and then you love your fellow citizens in your own country, and then, after that, you can focus [on] and prioritize the rest of the world."

This is part of Pope Francis' response:

"I have followed closely the major crisis that is taking place in the United States with the initiation of a program of mass deportations. The rightly formed conscience cannot fail to make a critical judgment and express its disagreement with any measure that tacitly or explicitly identifies the illegal status of some migrants with criminality. At the same time, one must recognize the right of a nation to defend itself and keep communities safe from those who have committed violent or serious crimes while in the country or prior to arrival. That said, the act of deporting people who in many cases have left their own land for reasons of extreme poverty, insecurity, exploitation, persecution or serious deterioration of the environment, damages the dignity of many men and women, and of entire families, and places them in a state of particular vulnerability and defenselessness.

This is not a minor issue: an authentic rule of law is verified precisely in the dignified treatment that all people deserve, especially the poorest and most marginalized. ...

Christians know very well that it is **only by affirming the infinite dignity of all that our own identity as persons and as communities reaches its maturity**. Christian love is not a concentric expansion of interests that little by little extend to other persons and groups. ... The true *ordo amoris* that must be promoted is that which we discover by meditating constantly on the parable of the "Good Samaritan" (cf. Lk 10:25-37), that is, by meditating on the love that builds a fraternity open to all, without exception.

But worrying about personal, community or national identity, apart from these considerations, easily introduces an ideological criterion that distorts social life and imposes the will of the strongest as the criterion of truth.

-Francis, From the Vatican, 10 February 2025

Francis maintains his conscious contact with God precisely by being in relationship with the most vulnerable. One of the touching things I've learned is that he has had a very close connection with the Holy Family parish/church in Gaza.

Since the outbreak of war, the Pope has called the parish and its community every evening at 7pm, checking in on their well-being amidst the Israeli offensive.

For someone who has a massive flock around the world, that is quite something. Talk about a commitment! I don't even call my mother that often. But maybe that's the point. It's not necessarily those who are closest to us who matter most in the kingdom of God – as the Veep thinks it is – 'take care of your own first'. Everyone matters, especially those who are suffering and who need God's presence the most. And oh my, Palestinians have needed it.

And as the Pope gives his presence away – as he gives God's love, he receives it back too.

Now, as he has been battling double pneumonia at Rome's Gemelli Hospital, the parishioners of the Holy Family church are giving back to him, sending him short albeit heartfelt video messages of prayer and encouragement.

The parish in Gaza not only continues its pastoral activities but currently hosts about 500 people who have been displaced by the Israeli bombings, offering shelter, food and accompaniment in a time of despair.

Making a commitment to maintaining the connection to God is what we need to do if we want to experience transformation. People don't like commitment anymore, but that is part of growing up. The world needs grown-ups right now because it seems that there are very few around. We need a grown-up faith to face the turbulence of this world. We need a grown-up faith so that we can be a light in the darkness and an anchor of peace in turbulent waters.

Thanks be to God. Amen

