

Ephesians 4:1_16 (NRSV)

¹I therefore, the prisoner in the Lord, beg you to lead a life worthy of the calling to which you have been called,
²with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love,
³making every effort to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. ⁴There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called to the one hope of your calling, ⁵one Lord, one faith, one baptism, ⁶one God and Father of all, who is above all and through all and in all. ⁷But each of us was given grace according to the measure of Christ's gift. ⁸Therefore it is said, "When he ascended on high he made captivity itself a captive; he gave gifts to his people."

¹¹The gifts he gave were that some would be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, some pastors and teachers,
¹²to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ, ¹³until all of us come to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to maturity, to the measure of the full stature of Christ. ¹⁴We must no longer be children, tossed to and fro and blown about by every wind of doctrine, by people's trickery, by their craftiness in deceitful scheming. ¹⁵But speaking the truth in love, we must grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ, ¹⁶from whom the whole body, joined and knit together by every ligament with which it is equipped, as each part is working properly, promotes the body's growth in building itself up in love.

To Be Mature (The Message)

⁴ ¹⁻³ In light of all this, here's what I want you to do. While I'm locked up here, a prisoner for the Master, I want you to get out there and walk—better yet, run!—on the road God called you to travel. I don't want any of you sitting around on your hands. I don't want anyone strolling off, down some path that goes nowhere. And mark that you do this with humility and discipline—not in fits and starts, but steadily, pouring yourselves out for each other in acts of love, alert at noticing differences and quick at mending fences.

⁴⁻⁶ You were all called to travel on the same road and in the same direction, so stay together, both outwardly and inwardly. You have one Master, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who rules over all, works through all, and is present in all. Everything you are and think and do is permeated with Oneness.

⁷⁻¹³ But that doesn't mean you should all look and speak and act the same. Out of the generosity of Christ, each of us is given his own gift. ...

He handed out gifts above and below, filled heaven with his gifts, filled earth with his gifts. He handed out gifts of apostle, prophet, evangelist, and pastor_teacher to train Christ's followers in skilled servant work, working within Christ's body, the church, until we're all moving rhythmically and easily with each other, efficient and graceful in response to God's Son, fully mature adults, fully developed within and without, fully alive like Christ.

¹⁴⁻¹⁶ No prolonged infancies among us, please. We'll not tolerate babes in the woods, small children who are an easy mark for impostors. God wants us to grow up, to know the whole truth and tell it in love—like Christ in everything. We take our lead from Christ, who is the source of everything we do. He keeps us in step with each other. His very breath and blood flow through us, nourishing us so that we will grow up healthy in God, robust in love.

Maturity - well, in some ways I hope I never grow up. I want to retain a child-like wonder. I want to be surprised by joy. I want to sing out and not be ashamed.... and sway to good music. I'm not a proper gal....

But, of course, maturity is way more than this. I was raised up to be responsible, to do the right thing. To help others. The Message for this morning says, "God wants us to grow up, to know the whole truth and tell it in love." Do you notice that children often do this.... they can tell the whole truth and tell it in love (not meaning to be hurtful) because they haven't learned etiquette. They haven't learned how to be tactful and cautious, some of which is very important. We learn to be careful and children often jump right in.

We can grow though and live into "humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love, making every effort to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace."
.... as our scripture says

In recent years, I've awakened to the importance of humility. Now, it is said, and I agree, that anytime we say we are humble..... we probably are not. Humility is something we reach toward. I like the definition that humility is about accepting that we are no better.... and no worse than anyone else. Humility is not about thinking less of ourselves or being less than others. It's about accepting our lives and ourselves... right where we are right now. When I am worrying about something, I need more acceptance and humility. If I am questioning another person's behavior or reaction, I need more humility to stop judging. Humility is often the solution to what ails us.

We get that we are born out of love, no matter what our parents were thinking... We understand on some level that we are part of a larger holy plan. We accept that each of us is worthy... We all have special and unique gifts. We all deserve the best. But oh, so many people continue to struggle to find true acceptance and love in these ways. Maturity isn't a place where we arrive one day; it is a state of mind and being that we are continuing toward and constantly becoming. I'm grateful that I continue to grow toward greater humility, patience, acceptance, and understanding.

And thankfully, I can say I've experienced progress.... I hope you have too. I have greater acceptance of others (most of the time). But, my patience toward others has always come easier than my response to my own behaviors and reactions. We have all heard that we are our own worst critic, and I certainly believe this to be true for me. I am very critical of myself when I make mistakes. I have a hard time letting it go.

We have shared here and are familiar with John Wesley's **3 simple rules**.... Do Good, Do no Harm, and Stay in love with God. We can acknowledge the ways we do this in our love and service to others. But as I thought about this, I realized how hard it is to do these things for ourselves.... Do good for ourselves.... we often forget to eat well, get plenty of rest, manage our lives in ways that bring balance vs. over-doing. This of course, also relates to Do no Harm. What would our lives and our health and well being be like if we really paid attention to this simple rule for ourselves? Staying in love with God... We get busy, preoccupied, and distracted and forget that when we stay grounded in the holy and live worthy, efficient, graceful, fully mature, healthy lives.... our lives are more balanced and so much more is possible.

So self care.... accepting that we are not better or worse than any other.... paying attention to our needs... finding a balance rather than believing that we need to do more and more and more.... these are all part of living a life of humility.

As I thought about what story might help to illustrate humility and on-going efforts to reach for maturity, I thought of the guru of growing up, Anne LaMott. In her book of essays, Grace (Eventually), she writes about when she and her friend Neshama agreed to be helpers in their friend Karen's special-ed dance class. She tells us:

One thing I love about Neshama is that, like Karen, she is willing to try anything that affords you the opportunity to shake up the Etch A Sketch of everything you suppose is true, a chance to question all your secret opinions: that this thing is good, that one is bad; that this person is better, that one is worse. I truly - or at least sort of - believe that we are all family, created of the same stuff, and that what is true for one of us is true for most of us. I pretend to believe that deep down.... I know that humans want and need exactly the same thing: to belong, to feel safe and respected. I also know that we don't live long. And dancing almost always turns out to be a good idea.

So there I was in dance class. There were eighteen adults of various ages and degrees of disability. I had seen many before [in the neighborhood.... and around].... Karen introduced Neshama and me as the evening's helpers and everyone murmured and hummed and explained, "The helpers!" They came to shake our hands or stare at us close up in awe.... Within ten minutes, I discovered that when I spoke to the people in dance class, the veil of illusion kept dropping. The ones who looked most like "the rest of us" were often the least available for contact, while the ones who looked seriously different were often the most responsive and engaged.

After the introductions, we did wiggly warm-up stretches to classic James Brown. And when the music ended, everyone spun around like the Godfather of Soul, while screaming, "Aaawwhhhooohh." I was pretty good at this and so was a young woman with cerebral palsy... spinning in her wheelchair, grinning.... In the wiggling, all people shine...

I will never know how hard it is to be developmentally disabled, but I do know the sorrow of being ordinary, and that much of our life is spent doing the crazy mental arithmetic of how, at any given moment, we might improve, or at least disguise or present our defects and screw-ups in either more charming or more intimidating ways.

With half an hour left... it was time for the actual dance instruction.... [and she goes into some detail about how surprised she was with the complicated steps] then mercifully Karen announced time for electric slide, a version of line dance. You begin by tapping your feet three times.... then do the Raisin Bran scoop, where you scoop the air twice. Then some wiggles and a pivot turn. Then you move forward, pushing the air as if clearing a path.... [and on and on]

[after all this, she tells us,] The magnificence of the dance is in their faces.

And when it was time to go, people shook hands and thanked us. Neshama and I left feeling elated and surprisingly tired. It had been only an hour, but it was an immersion. It went deeper than I [expected.]... One of the dancers said, "I like those old ladies! They were helpers, and they danced." That's what [I will remember] I was a helper and I danced.

Well, this sweet story speaks so much of humility. Humility is about letting go of our fears and hesitation and joining in. Humility means we all have something to contribute. I'm no better or worse than anyone else. We all have something to offer to the world... and we can learn sometimes from the most unlikely people or situations.

Yes, we can often generously see this from another's perspective. We give them the benefit of the doubt. But, can we see ourselves in this way, too? Can we accept that we are okay.... right here and right now. Doing our best and striving to be all that we are meant to be.... whatever that is.

Parker Palmer in his book Healing the Heart of Democracy has said that we need to develop habits of the heart to live successfully into today. There are two words, which he says, summarize these habits: chutzpah and humility. "By chutzpah I mean knowing that I have a voice that needs to be heard and the right to speak it. By humility I mean accepting the fact that my truth is always partial and may not be true at all - so I need to listen with openness and respect, and especially to 'the other,' as much as I need to speak my own voice with clarity and conviction."

We are rewarded when we live a worthy life of humility and acceptance, a life of patience and love. We don't have to push ourselves to be winners. We don't have to try to be number one or the best at whatever gifts we have been given. We are rewarded with serenity and peace, knowing that we are doing our best right here and now to be all that we are meant to be. And we are not meant to go it alone. We are "knit together", "moving rhythmically and easily with each other, efficient and graceful" as the God's church. That sounds like a dance.

So, being a grown up doesn't mean we can no longer play. Being a grown up means we know **when** to play. And when to dance.