

Colossians 1:28-29 and Hebrews 5:11-14  
“A call to maturity”

It is great to be back with you and to be able to step behind this pulpit and to do the thing that I love, preach the Word of God, for I know that is transformative and able to change hearts and minds. We had a wonderful time in Washington State in preparing for Rachel’s wedding, it rained every single day that we were there. But we got a lot done, and we continue to pray for healing for Stacy’s dad and he still has a bit of a journey ahead of him. I so appreciate you as a church allowing us the time that you do to get away, and what a joy it is knowing that Michael Wilson is here not just to fill in, but to continue along the mission of this church through the preached Word.

We worshiped at Whidbey Island Missionary Alliance Church, it was the closest one to where we stayed. It was nice, but it also made me appreciate even more all of you. Absence makes the heart grow fonder, is that the saying. That sure is the case with us, isn’t it? I am so grateful to be a pastor to a mature community of faith, and I don’t mean by age, but by loyalty, involvement, and spiritual maturity. Churches can be insular and difficult to break into, and they sometimes lose their focus of reaching out and sending people to come to know Jesus. Especially when things are difficult the tendency for a church is to get even more insular, and to stop reaching out and focus more on the inside, on its own membership at the cost of reaching out into the community.

That was the danger in Hebrews as things were getting more and more difficult in the society as the government and the synagogue was more and more actively seeking out Christians and persecuting them, it was hard to stay outward focused when the threat to the church was on the outside. A church whose programs only focus on those within the community could lead to an immature church, but it is so nice to be a part of a church that understands its role in the community and in the world. Our goal as a church is to bring people to a saving knowledge of Jesus.

We preach Christ crucified so that those who do not know him may come to know him and have that opportunity as they step into the doors of this sanctuary, and as we reach out to the community around us. But what happens then once you give your life to Christ, and you are a disciple? The goal is to present everyone mature in Christ, as Colossians states. That has been one of our primary Scriptures here at this church. We have a number of them, don’t we?

Matthew 25 is one of them as well. There are others, probably Psalm 23 with all the people who have been resurrected in this church over this past year.

Our reading in Hebrews this morning speaks about what it looks like to be mature in Christ. Let's read.

### **READ**

God has made our bodies in pretty spectacular ways. Babies when they are born don't have a fully developed digestive system and so can only eat very limited items, primarily milk. God has made it so that the mother is able to produce that milk that the baby needs and for a while, about 6 months or more, that is all the baby needs. But then over time as the baby grows, the milk isn't quite enough, the baby needs more than just the mother's milk to continue to grow and be healthy.

Our first born almost every time that she ate as an infant would not just spit up, but would projectile spit up. You could almost use her as a weapon, as a rocket launcher, after she ate, you could point her to someone across the room and she could reach them, almost like clockwork. She's grown out of that for the most part. The author of Hebrews speaks about the need for milk when one is an infant, but the necessity to move past milk and onto more solid food.

We see this same analogy used in I Corinthians 3 where Paul tells the church at Corinth that he is disappointed in them because they have not moved past milk and they are old enough, but just not mature enough, to eat solid food, and are still stuck on milk. The example is used to describe our spiritual maturity. As we are new in the faith it is okay to have milk. In fact, in the listing of what it takes to be an elder and a deacon in II Timothy we read that they are not to be a new convert. As infants, as spiritually immature and still growing it is not good to be given a lot of decision making in the church lest you be puffed up.

But at some point you have to begin on solid food, you have to move past the milk, and recognize that now is the time to be mature. Again Rachel, the one of projectile spit up, began her solid food with crusts of good Neapolitan bread and leaves of artichokes. Not your traditional way of starting out, but as she did, it clearly cut down and eventually eliminated the reaction to the milk. That is the normal progression of things, you start with milk and then you move on to solid food.

The same is true, says the author of Hebrews, for our spiritual journeys. We start with being taught and sitting at the feet of our Sunday School teachers, at confirmation, and then even

as we progress through Bible studies and our own Scripture readings and time of prayer and devotion and spiritual disciplines, which then prepares us for solid food. The author tells his community you should all be on solid food by now. Look at vs. 12, you should all be teachers by now, but instead you are still stuck on needing to hear and understand the basic of the Word of God, that which you should have learned back in confirmation.

First Presbyterian has lost a lot of pillars of this community over this past year. We have lost many of those whom we considered the eaters of solid food. Sometimes it takes a real clear loss of mature members to spark the realization that by now, we should all be looking to take leadership in the church. It is now our time, we have been here for 16 years, or for 10 years, or for 5 years. Or even if I am newer to the church I have known Jesus and have grown with him for decades now.

The transition from being a spectator at the church to being a leader is a difficult step, but it is a necessary one and it is one that must take place, otherwise the church itself has the danger of reverting back to milk and not solid food because it has a reticent leadership. The author loves the church to whom he is writing. In fact, while these words are harsh, it is clear in 6:9 that he admires them and is grateful for them. But life is hard and when it is hard it is easier to be insular and just circle the wagons and not be active and a part of the life of the church in a way where you are relied upon for something.

He tells them, you have loved Jesus long enough so that it is now your time to step up and show leadership and not just be on the receiving, but begin to show leadership. You should be teachers, or elders, or deacons, or Trustees. The author here understands the church as the training grounds for making followers of Jesus mature. I love that image. Look at vs.14 where we have the image of being trained through practice to live according to righteousness. There's that word again! The church is the training grounds, we have talked about that before. What we do here is practice for what we do out there.

So how do we become more mature in here? John Chrysostom, one of the early church fathers, asked that same question when he preached on this Scripture. How do we become trained? He states that the church is a vital part of our growth. We have to hear the Word of God and put Scripture into practice. This is what the author is stating in vs. 12 about the basic truths of the Word of God, this is where we learn it and this is also where we put it into practice.

This is a real call to maturity. There is a danger in seeing that which is spiritually immature as mature within the world around us, because everyone is saying that they are followers of Jesus and people are on opposite sides of things that are really important. What does immaturity look like? Someone who is not able to put into practice what they have heard. So clearly their life is one of chasing after the wind and not chasing after righteousness. We are not to spend our time putting people on a maturity scale of more mature or less mature, but in our own lives do we find ourselves supporting that which is clearly not the way of Jesus, clearly not righteousness and justifying it with the blanket of personal or national security?

Or do we justify that which is clearly not the way of righteousness by saying everyone has a right to be who they want to be which is one of the least Christ follower things to say, as opposed to everyone has the joy to live into who Jesus wants us to be. Since when have our desires and our wants taken priority over righteousness or being able to distinguish between right and wrong. This is maturity, to deny ourselves for the sake of Christ.

A call to maturity is a call back to the basics. Scripture, prayer, action, remember that? Solid food is intended for all followers of Jesus, not just a select few. Let's be clear, though, lack of knowledge does not imply missing out on salvation. Immaturity doesn't relegate you to be cast off from the kingdom. But he also states that we should all be mature by now, and some of us choose to stay on the sideline because we prefer the milk over the solid food.

I am calling us to maturity, we are able to step out in faith and be trained and then in turn reach others with the love of Christ. It is time. Amen.