



## **YOUNG ADULT SUNDAY**

### **LECTIONARY COMMENTARY**

**Sunday, May 24, 2009**

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**Lection - 1 Corinthians 13:11-12** (New Revised Standard Version)

(v. 11) When I was a child, I spoke like a child, I thought like a child, I reasoned like a child; when I became an adult, I put an end to childish ways. (v. 12) For now we see in a mirror, dimly, but then we will see face to face. Now I know only in part; then I will know fully, even as I have been fully known.

#### **I. Description of the Liturgical Moment**

This Sunday, we focus our attention on the congregations' young adults. Special care given to the needs of this generation is invaluable, because their moment to assume positions of religious leadership is no longer an awaited event but very much realized and vital to the life of the Church. As young adults continue to transition into further adulthood and obtain greater responsibility within the church, fostering spiritual maturity and growth takes on particular relevance to our communities of faith.

## II. Biblical Interpretation for Preaching and Worship; 1 Corinthians 13:11-12

### Part One: The Contemporary Contexts of the Interpreter

As a twenty-something year-old graduate student, I am very aware of the paradoxical way in which I am labeled with my peers as the generation that both grew up too fast and refuses to fully grow up. We are characterized as living somewhere between hastened maturity and prolonged immaturity. Within the first extreme, we are said to have grown up too fast. This is partially attributed to the sheer volume and variety of experiences to which we were exposed. Our childhoods included dependence on the Internet, lessened media censorship, and vastly expanded communication capabilities. Our adolescence was characterized, and largely influenced by, our access to realities far more vast than our immediate, personal experiences.

On the other hand, we are said to be a demographic that prolongs adolescence. Social commentators and media moguls commonly make this supposition plain through phrases such as, “Thirty is the new twenty.” We delay in obtaining job security, starting families, and moving out of our parents’ homes. We cling to portions of our cultural forms of adolescence longer than did our parents.

As generations past and present continue to comment on the anomaly that is our hesitation and haste to maturity, we must examine the ways our unique experiences relate to our spiritual journey. Our path to spiritual maturity is unique. Thus, we must give careful attention and critique to the intricacies of our transitions into maturity that may be used to help us better serve our God, world communities, and churches.

### Part Two: Biblical Commentary

Our text for today is found in the book of 1 Corinthians. Attributed to the Prophet Paul, the general themes of this letter to the Corinthian Church include an emphasis on these first century Christians’ relationships with one another and with God. A key theme in 1 Corinthians is the need for the church and its members to mature in the faith. In chapter 13, Paul relates immaturity to partial knowledge and blurred vision. “Though we once saw dimly, we now see fully.” As Paul advocates for maturity, he encourages the budding Christian Church to abandon ways that are divisive (Chapter 1), self-seeking (Chapter 11), lacking wisdom (Chapter 6), undiscerning (Chapter 6), and whimsical (Chapter 5). Maintaining such conduct has resulted in numerous moral and structural problems within the church. Further, it has compromised the efficacy of the sacraments and the sharing of the Gospel.

It is in this vein that our passage takes up the language of childhood. Though we once talked, thought, and reasoned like children, we are supposed to grow up. We are to put away childish things that are hurting God’s people so that we can begin doing, thinking, and being in ways that are mature and that embody the fullness of God’s love.

To begin, Paul’s insight encourages us to put away childish ways of **doing** that are self-preserving and to take up ways of doing that are for the flourishing of whole communities. Despite the ways in which our modern American context inspires survival tactics and validates

individualism, Paul would argue this behavior to be childish. Self-seeking works must mature into communal efforts.

Second, Paul prompts the church to put away childish ways of **thinking** that focus on immediate gratification so that our thinking can examine the future impacts of present decisions. As children, we never had to plan for the future. Satisfying our present needs sufficed. We are encouraged to continue this behavior by a society driven by immediate gratification. Microwaves, cell phones, and instant everything encourage us to believe that we live only for the now. But the strength of our faith communities and families exists in the wisdom to discern how our present decisions will impact generations to come. We are called to make good decisions, even uncomfortable ones, now, so that our communities may continue to flourish. Even if we do not see all of the fruits of our labors, we must make preparations now for future generations.

Finally, Paul challenges us to put away childish ways of **being** solely recipients of others' efforts so that we can be responsible, active participants who share. We are encouraged to be responsible sharers, not just receivers, because growing up means learning to be more than benefactors of other people's work. We were once too young to vote, and lacked the knowledge and experience to make major decisions for ourselves or others. And now, we are required to make responsible decisions, select competent political candidates, and make choices about the future of our churches and communities. We are no longer waiting. We are the leaders the world awaited. We can no longer be catered to and fed milk by those laboring around us (1 Corinthians 3:2). It is time for us to not only be ready for solid food, but to join in efforts to produce such provisions. Being mature in the faith means becoming persons who give back to the communities that first nourished us.

Paul is discouraging childishness because there are characteristics of childishness that lead to self-centered, individualistic worldviews that opt for fleeting personal comfort and contentment over sustained, Godly achievements for our communities. Such childishness in our spiritual walks offer little good to the world and little hope for the future of the Christian Church. But, Paul believes that God's power can spiritually mature us into adults whose thinking, being, and doing operates in a mature manner out of the fullness of God.

## **Celebration**

Because of the power of God's love and faith, there is hope for our churches and for us as young adults. Because of God's faithfulness and love, we have the strength to develop into communities that carry out the loving, liberating works for which our world searches. By God's faithfulness and love, as we mature even more, we are drawn closer to God so that we may better know God and demonstrate God's character to the world.

## **Descriptive Details**

The descriptive details in this passage include:

**Sights:** Seeing in a mirror dimly (v. 12); seeing an image fully; and

**Sounds:** Speaking like a child (v. 11); here preachers can find a variety of examples of childish speech. In this scripture, the sound of the speech is not the main focus, but the maturity level indicated by what is said.