

May 15, 2011
Fourth Sunday of Easter

“Maturely Trusting a Just God”

1 Peter 2:19-25

I recently completed the Dave Ramsey Financial Peace University class we offered here. I liked it. It offered a lot of common sense financial advice. One of the points he made was that we get ourselves in financial trouble by insisting on immediate gratification when we desire to purchase something, and that doing so is childish. He said one of the marks of being an adult is the ability and willingness to delay a desire until you can afford it. The problem is that as consumers, a lot of us are still little kids. We want our toys, we want them now, and we don't want to think about or deal with the consequences of the credit card bill later.

This financial immaturity is very similar to Christian immaturity; an immaturity all Christians revert to from time to time although some on a more regular basis than others. In our relationships with others we want immediate gratification, immediate reward. And we want it like little children.

When we do something, we want praise. Children do this all the time. “Look what I did,” they demand as they show you their latest finger painting or project. They expect and usually receive the “Good job” and fawning all over them that a parent or teacher provides. As adults we can be the same way. We want folks to see our good works and say, “Wow. Those are some really good works!”

And on the negative side, we want immediate gratification too. If we suffer, we want it to stop—NOW! If we are wronged, we want swift justice and even vengeance—NOW! If we are inconvenienced, we want whatever it is fixed—NOW! We are like little kids. If hit we want to hit back. If something doesn't go our way we want to yell and scream until somebody changes things. And the real kicker is that in the midst of all these demands for gratification and reward, we think we're right and deserving of what we want. We want whatever it is NOW and we aren't thinking about the future. Like a child, we tend to think we are at the center of the universe and we deserve what we want because, well, we're us.

That's why Bible passages like in Peter's epistle for today really blow our minds. These are the readings that we really like to forget are in the Bible. *“For this is a gracious thing, when, mindful of God, one endures sorrows while suffering unjustly. For what credit is it if, when you sin and are beaten for it, you endure? But if when you do good and suffer for it you endure, this is a gracious thing in the sight of God.”*

“Endure suffering!?! Me?? I don't think so! I deserve better than that!” That's what our earthly inner child says. And even as immature Christians we want the Sunday school version of Christianity that says Jesus loves me so life should be happy and rosy all the time. Suffering isn't part of the picture we want to deal with.

And although the sentiment applies to all of us, Peter is here specifically addressing slaves and servants who are suffering under harsh and nasty masters, possibly suffering very unjustly because the slaves have converted to following the way of Jesus. Suffering is bad enough, but suffering unjustly? No way! If I get hurt unjustly I hit back! Right? That's only fair!

Fair shmair. That's not how it works for mature Christians. We know that fair never came into the equation when our Lord went to the cross for us. And we who are in Him follow His example.

“For to this you have been called, because Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example, so that you might follow in his steps. He committed no sin, neither was deceit found in his mouth. When he was reviled, he did not revile in return; when he suffered, he did not threaten, but continued entrusting himself to him who judges justly. He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree, that we might die to sin and live to righteousness. By his wounds you have been healed.”

It was not fair that Jesus should leave the glory of God to join with a fallen humanity. It was not justice by our standards that this innocent divine man should suffer and die in our place. If anyone ever had the right to say, “I shouldn’t have to suffer,” it was the sinless Son of God. If anyone had the right to hit back, it was almighty God in Christ Jesus, being afflicted by the rebellious creation that had been created through Himself. He didn’t hit back. He didn’t talk back. He remained silent. He suffered unjustly that we might be saved.

Why did He do it? Well, I could speak of His great love. I could speak of God’s brand of justice. I could speak of grace and mercy. But the point that Peter makes is that Jesus was *“entrusting himself to him who judges justly.”*

Throughout the mocking, the beating, the unjust trial before Pilate and the council, the torture and finally the crucifixion, Jesus was looking forward to the judgment of God Almighty. Jesus faced every temptation to turn against God, to seek immediate gratification and save Himself, the same temptations we succumb to all the time, yet He was without sin. Jesus in His suffering and dying for the sins of the world was doing the will of God. And Jesus knew that on the other side of death on the cross was His resurrection to eternal glory.

Mature Christians follow this example of trust. We serve God by serving others even in those situations when it is tough to serve, because this is pleasing to God, who is going to be pleased with us in the just judgment of God. We love others when they don’t love in return, when they don’t praise or show thanks for our efforts, because God wants us to reflect His love for us, a love that will be revealed in the just judgment of God. We don’t act and react out of anger, hatred, jealousy and malice when we are wronged, because Jesus set the example of not returning evil for evil, but returning forgiveness for evil, a forgiveness that will be made plain in the just judgment of God.

All this we do because we trust in God’s promise that those who believe in Christ will be saved. We are entrusting ourselves to the God who judges justly, and we know that we’ll land on the “not guilty” and glorious side of that judgment, not because God praises us for our good works and we deserve the verdict. But because we have been baptized into Christ and through the gift of faith dwell in Him who did not revile, hate and hold onto earthly desires, but trusted God perfectly. We are in Him. He is in us. Our calling is to be Him to the world, even in suffering and suffering unjustly.

This is Christian maturity. The self-centered childish Christian says “No way,” and refuses to bear with others in love, even refuses to forgive those who wrong them. They see themselves as the righteous victim, and thus are due justice NOW. But that’s just chasing the world, looking for immediate gratification, not considering what God has promised to those who trust on His plan, His justice, His holy name.

Trust in the God who judges justly, yet judges us through the sinless Jesus Christ. Struggle to follow His example of love unyielding to the world’s nastiness; of serving and forgiving, no matter how much injustice you suffer.

Dave Ramsey talks of finances and says adults think in the long term. God’s Word says think in eternal terms. Be a mature Christian, know that immediate gratification in the world

means nothing in a world that is perishing. Know that fair means that we get what we deserve, and before a holy God that would mean an eternity of suffering. Know that Jesus Christ took the punishment we deserve to the cross, knowing that through His suffering in perfect faith His death led to standing in glory with God the Father Almighty. His promise is to share that glory with us.

Know that through the forgiveness Jesus won all of our childish wrongdoing has been cast away. We look forward through our own suffering now, toward the completion of our present salvation in Christ's glory forever. So don't be childish in your faith and in your hardships and sufferings. As much as you can, be Christ.

Amen.