

“So That You May Grow”
Acts 7:55-60; 1 Peter 2:2-10;
John 14:1-14

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Happy Mother’s Day! It is a wonderful time of year; a time to remember our mothers, or people who are mothers, or people who act like mothers. One day is nice, but really, mothers are worth celebrating every day. It’s a great thing to take a day to remember, but I want to help us think about how we can remember, not just on this one day, but throughout our days, remembering how we can encourage and celebrate and say thank you to the people who do mothering in our lives or in the lives of those we love.

When I think about the word “mother” I can’t think of it as a singular word. I always think of mother and child because for me, the two seem to always go together. There’s always this sense that when you have a mother, you also have a child. Because of that you have this relationship going on. The main thing about my understanding of what mothering is all about is bringing up a child in a way that tries to bring that child to the best life it can have. That’s what the goal, you might say, of mothering is—to enable a child to become the person they can become, to encourage them and show them the love they need so that’s a possibility. A child can depend on that relationship as they grow up.

I want to suggest that the passages for today reflect that same hope, the desire for some children to grow up and be who they can be. The one with that hope is God. God is encouraging us as God’s children so that we might grow up. I like the way it is said in the Peter passage: *Like newborn infants, long for the pure and spiritual milk, so that by it you may grow into salvation – if indeed you have tasted that the Lord is good.*

It’s interesting that Sydney decided to give the Sunday School teachers herbs that help them have something that tastes good, because this passage suggests that there’s a way we taste of God, the goodness of God. I don’t know about you, but when I taste something that is really good, I want more of it. Peter presents the idea that we can taste that God is good, that we want more of what that is, and that from that we then grow up into our salvation.

I think that is what is happening with Jesus as he is talking to his disciples as well. He is inviting them to grow up. There’s a little bit of a sense that I get when I look at what Jesus is saying that’s like, “Really? You’ve been with me all this time. I’m going to have to spell it out?”

I heard somebody the other day give an example of a metaphor for this. There’s a person who has a house, but he doesn’t know how to get in. Whenever anybody comes over, they look in the windows and he talks about how great the kitchen is and how wonderful the living room is. He has a ladder up to the bedroom window so he can point out his bedroom and how wonderful it is, but he’s living in a tent in the yard.

It's a little bit that way with the disciples. They are going along with Jesus and he's trying to lead them into a place, and they are still camping out in the yard because they don't know how to get there. So what he wants to do is give them some help and guidance in how to move into the very dwelling that God wants to give them. Peter talks about the living stones that we can use to create the dwelling in which we will live and worship. What Jesus says is, "I've been with you and shown you all that."

Why don't they see it? I think the main reason that they don't see it is, look at the questions they ask. "Show us God." Now, *that's* a simple thing to do. They want this grand experience. They want "God" written in the sky or something. They want God to show up in a big way, but God simply wants to come into their lives and walk beside them and invite them to hear some teaching, to see people healed, to see grace in action, to see the wonder of what it means to really live together as a group of disciples.

It's interesting when Jesus says, "I am the way, the truth and the life." I feel like he's saying, "All right. I'll make it really simple for you. Look to what we're doing. I'm already teaching you the works of God, the way to be God's children. I'm already showing you what it means to be real—truth—real. I'm already showing you what it means to be alive." So he's inviting them to recognize that as they are with him they are receiving that very thing.

I feel like I'm a lot like the disciples, and even after I've tasted that God is good and I know I want God to be in my life, I'm a little bit like a young woman I heard a spiritual director talk about. This young woman came to her and said, "I'm going into my prayer time and I'm doing it diligently, but I'm just not experiencing God. I'm pursuing God, but God's not showing up." That's an interesting thought. She then went on to tell the director about how when she did her art what a wonderful experience she had, how she felt incredibly joyful and happy. Maybe God was showing up there, but the young woman just didn't see it.

What I find is that when I try to pursue God, try to tell God where God is supposed to show up, it doesn't always work. But when I open my life and my heart and my soul to what God might be doing, when I take a step back and recognize the wonder of who God is, I see that God showing up at all, in any way, is an incredible gift. And perhaps God is showing up as I walk with Christ's disciples, as I see the wonder of grace in people's lives or the grace given to me.

I don't say God never shows up in prayer, because I believe he does, but I don't believe I can force God to show up in prayer or that prayer is the only place God shows up. Does God only show up in worship? God shows up because God is already present. I sometimes think the reason I don't see God more often is mostly because of my blindness, my inability to see.

When Jesus says that he is the Way, the Truth and the Life, he is saying, "Look. Look what we're doing. This is the way. It's a way to grow into your salvation. This is

real life. It's a way, a path, a journey; it's real, and it's life. The word for "life" there really means "vitality." It's this idea that when we come with Jesus and enter into the family of God we are on our way to being alive and entering into a house that before we didn't know how to get into. We have a place to dwell, a place to be with the family, and in that we find the very encouragement we need and we know that there in another house beyond that waits. It's fairly simple. To walk in the way means to recognize what Jesus has done.

John 3:16—I always go back to that because it says *God so loved the world that he sent his son*. How is Jesus the way? Jesus is the way because he's God's love come to be with us and be among us. He is guiding us into the kind of life God wants for us, and the kind of everlasting life God wants for us. As we begin to listen to him, we recognize that as we follow him and see him as the way, we try to do what he might do.

I think about Matthew 25 where he says, "You will see me when you feed the hungry, give the thirsty water, when you welcome the stranger, when you clothe the naked, when you visit the sick and those in prison." Again, he's showing us a very simple way to see God in our midst as we care for others. As we give of ourselves, as we walk together, as we form relationships, we recognize the way we care for one another is the very thing that Jesus has done. He not only has shown us all that, he's also taken on our brokenness and said, "I'll take care of that. You work on the way, the truth and the life."

Jesus leads us into a place of joy; a place of joy in caring for one another, encouraging one another to grow into our salvation, to grow to be God's people, and to know the joy of being in that house of living stones. Amen.