

Christianity for Grown-ups!

Isaiah 61^{1-4,8-end}; Ps 126; 1 Thessalonians 5¹⁶⁻²⁴; John 1^{6-8,19-28}

Test everything; hold fast to what is good. (1 Thessalonians 5²¹)

My ears pricked up on Tuesday this week at an item on the Radio. It was discussing how adult children revert to being children again when they come home for things like Christmas. Even though they have grown up, left home, have families of their own and may not even have keys to the 'family home' they still come through the door, graze the fridge as a matter of routine, leave 'stuff' all over the place and generally act in a way that they never would in the space for which they are responsible. (With some family here today I am simply stating this without comment.)

Does that explain why, as Christians, when we visit God's house we don't feel as if we need to 'grow up' when we come here and that infantilises us and what we believe?

What does grown up faith look like?

- ✦ Our identity is defined by our relationship with Jesus. John the Baptist was asked by the Jewish authorities: **who are you?** They knew that he was different and tried to define him by figures they could identify him with - the **Messiah** as they understood this promised figure; **Elijah** or; **Isaiah**. But John pointed forward to Jesus, someone different: he recognised he was **not worthy to tie the thong of his sandal**. When a baby is born there is often a great deal of discussion about who the baby looks like: evolution has generally disadvantaged children so that they look like their father! When we look at the baby Jesus the difference is that we should look like the baby and not to get the baby to look like us. Grown up faith is when we are recognised as belonging to Jesus in how we look, what we do and in what we say.
- ✦ Our response to anything and everything has to be faithful, hopeful and joyful. The Psalmist sums it up when he talks about the people of faith as those **who sow in tears** but then **reap with shouts of joy**. Isaiah talks about those **clothed with the garments of salvation** and **covered with a robe of righteousness** - with the exuberance of **garlands** and **jewels**: all of which comes from the decision - **I will greatly rejoice in the Lord; my whole being shall exult in my God**. Paul's advice to the Thessalonians is similar: **rejoice always, pray without ceasing, give thanks in all circumstances**. Sulky and sullen Christians show that they

haven't grown up enough to trust God - they have yet to know for themselves **the one who calls you in faithful and he will do this** (keep us sound in body and soul as well as being blameless).

- ✦ Our attitude to others is positive. The challenge is clear enough and it is an expression of grown-up faith and evidence of anointing and the Spirit of God:
 - ✦ **Bring Good News to the oppressed;**
 - ✦ **Bind up the brokenhearted;**
 - ✦ **Proclaim liberty to captives and release to prisoners;**
 - ✦ **Proclaim the year of the Lord's favour;**
 - ✦ **Proclaim comfort to those who mourn.**

This means that people of faith are Good News to others. This is all about allowing the concerns of others to be important enough to us for us to do something about - and it is important to us because it is important to God!

There is a world of difference between being child-like (trusting; positive; etc) and childish (selfish; sullen; etc). Grown-up Christians remain child-like but reject being childish!