

The Eleventh Sunday after Pentecost. The scripture text is taken from Matthew 15:10-20

A number of years ago, Eric Berne, authored a “self-help” book, entitled, “I’m OK, You’re OK”. In this Book, Dr. Berne, dealt with human relationships, in a lighter, popular, style, rather than in a clinical way, using these three helpful terms, to describe the ways, in which humans, respond to one another: the Parent, the Child, and the Adult.

These terms mean something like this. (1) “The Parent”, is one’s critical self, authoritative, or authoritarian, law-abiding and rule making, perhaps the way you might have thought of your parents when you were growing up, and in a negative sense, the Parent may define him or herself, through punishment and judgmental attitudes.

(2) “The Child”, is the irresponsible self, counting on the “Parent” to be responsible; that is, the “Child” is controlled by the Parent, either willingly, or unwillingly, trying to keep the rules, or by striving to overcome them.

The Child is undeveloped emotionally and is egocentric, so that the child does not reach maturity and/or, take responsibility for him or herself.

Now there may be good things to be said, for the Parent and the Child: The Parent will be a solid citizen, and oriented towards good deeds, and The Child may likely be spontaneous and fun-loving.

But they are dependent upon one another: The Parent needs someone to make rules for, and to rule over; The Child needs a “Parent” to set the guidelines, in which he or she may then abide by, or rebel against.

But the (3) “Adult” is the grown up responsible self. The “Adult” is an “autonomous” person, who can make rules for him or herself, without the psychological need to make rules for others; the Adult is free to live within his or her own expectations, not demanding that others meet his or her expectations.

The “Adult”, in other words, is the full realization of our grown-up humanity. It is what we are supposed to be, a complete person, able to share oneself, with another person, when one chooses to do so, rather than desperately, needing someone else to complete us.

For instance, politicians, talk-show hosts, and an assortment of others, would be good examples of “Parents”, celebrities we might think of as “Children”.

It occurs to me, that a dog might be a “Child”, or one’s cat, might be a “Parent”; but there may be times, when any of our pets may act towards us as “Adults”, loving us freely, and sharing their pet humanity, (so to speak) with us without seeking rewards.

This passage from Matthew’s Gospel, chapter 15, reminds us of the terms; Parent and Child. The gospel narrative for today, is a continuation of verses 1 through 9, in which the scribes and the Pharisees (the Parents) come to Jesus, to demand that he explain, why he didn’t make his disciples (the children) wash their hands before eating.

You can see where Jesus makes reference to this in verse 20. (Which Jesus says: “These are what defile a person, but to eat with unwashed hands does not defile). There are two things we need to know about their question.

First of all, this is not a cleanliness issue, but a religious one. The religious leaders are asking about ritual washing; and these religious leaders, contend that it is necessary to wash, not for health reasons or hygienic reasons, but in order to eat without sinning.

And second, God did not command that His people go find a sink, a basin, a bathtub, a stream, a creek, or a river and go wash their hands before dinner. Yes, it is good idea to wash your hands before you eat, that's just common sense. It's a good idea, but it is not a commandment.

Washing was a tradition that was passed on, like so many other traditions, perhaps a suggestion, a careful way to keep the Law of Moses, until these hundreds of traditions, were written down and over time gained the status as commandments, and actually became Jewish Law.

Someone has counted over 613 commandments in the Torah, but that wasn't enough for the scribes and Pharisees.

Understand, the Pharisees would take what the law of Moses said, and add to it, like they were scoring points with the All-Mighty. Like God would be saying: "Way to Go, glad to have you on the team!"

The Pharisees are the perfect example of the judgmental and rule-making mindset of the "Parent". But fortunately, we have an "Adult" on the scene.

Of course, Jesus is the Adult here, able to think for Himself, able to see past the Parents need, either from a desire for power and control, or feelings of uncertainty, to create more intricate and difficult rules.

To complete the picture, I count the people in this passage as Children (remember, there cannot be Children without Parents), who seemingly believe all this stuff the Pharisees tell them; and Jesus' disciples, who appear to be worried, that Jesus had hurt their feelings.

But Jesus will have none of that. Jesus will not give in to the "Parent" or the "Child". God will uproot and tear down what He does not create or require, all these traditions that only detract from the meaning of the real commandments and the Pharisees, and all the Parents out there, will be left in the dark.

"Blind guides", as Jesus calls them, in verse 14 and leading others into untruth, leading the Children along paths where they all will fail.

But then comes the most remarkable thing of all in this passage. Beginning at verse 10, Jesus even speaks against the food laws of the Torah, and these are rules that do come from God.

Jesus said: "Listen and understand, it is not what goes into the mouth that defiles a person, but it is what comes out of the mouth that defiles." (vs 10-11)

Why would Jesus seek to negate God's Law? The Parent can't do that, the rules that define him, the "Child" can't do that, because that would be merely, rebellion against the rules.

Only Jesus, the "Adult" can speak to such an idea, because he understands the meaning behind the rules; and calls the Children to focus on the meaning of the commandments: "Listen and understand", Jesus says to the people.

Jesus knows that His words are not just a tearing down of the Law, nor are they a rebellion against God's commandment, but rather, he sees, that at the heart of the rules, is a God of love, and

mercy, whom we should love, and praise, who desires obedience not just for the sake of obedience, but so that people can remain in a relationship with Him.

The “Parent” and the “Child”, are concerned with things that are external, like the food and drink, that enters the mouth and goes into the stomach.

But the “Adult” is concerned with the heart, and from there, words, deeds, and thoughts, move outward, that reveal a real look at our humanity, where there is a selfish and sinful nature, like the sins that Jesus mentions in verse 19 (for out of the heart, come evil intentions, murder, adultery, fornication, theft, false witness, slander), and so forth.

The “Adult” sees these things, the Child does not. God sees these things, more often than not, we don’t.

We call God, “Our Father”, but using the “Parent”, “Child”, or “Adult”, terminology, we must understand, God to be the Adult.

This is how Jesus saw God, and where He learned to be an “Adult”, himself. Jesus saw the purposes of God, that revealed such love for His creation.

God is not a celestial tyrant or a celestial bully, but the Holy Adult, calling to us, to grow into Adulthood, so that we may have a relationship with God, becoming ever more faithful and Christ-like in our daily lives.

Though we are God’s children, by grace, through faith in Christ, we must become Adults, and that means, we are to have a deeper understanding of God and His Holy Word and how it applies to our lives. This about growing in our faith, and living out that faith, regardless of time and place.

I want you to think about this, each of us started out as a Child in this world, that’s life, there’s no need to explain that, and we needed our Parents, to make the rules for us as Children, so that we could learn, and survive in the real, everyday world.

But as we grew in years, the rules are generally adjustable, they change, as we change, or else we remain a Child, not knowing the meaning of the rules, or we become a Parent, a grown up, with a limited understanding about the purpose of the rules, and usually with an immature attitude.

The truth is, we have bits of the Child, the Parent and the Adult in our minds, (in our way of thinking) because our mothers and fathers along with all the good they did for us, were not perfect, they made mistakes, they experienced successes and they experienced failures, and we watched them in both the good times and in the bad, and we learned from them. We are a reflection of them.

We inherited not only our genes from our mothers and fathers but we inherited their beliefs, their emotions, their logic, or lack of it, their view of the world whether for good or for bad, this causes us to think and act in the way we do. You and I are products of our parents as well as our experiences in life and of our environment as well.

Yet, we are different people in our separate relationships. For instance, with some of our friends, we may still be children; with those whom we work with, or those who work beneath us, or with people different from us, we may be Parents; and in our better moments, we try to be Adults, and equal to each other.

But the important question is, “What are we becoming?” What are we becoming? I would hope, and I mean this sincerely, that you and I are becoming more devoted disciples of our Lord Jesus Christ, and that we are constantly growing and maturing in our faith.

I would hope that you and I are not too much worried about following the rules perfectly, but rather we are more concerned about our attitude. Or, as Jesus says in verse 18: “But what comes out of the mouth proceeds from the heart, and this is what defiles.”

Brothers and Sisters in Christ, God doesn't sweat the small stuff, He doesn't chalk up how many times we have messed up or made a mess of our lives, or how many times we have won the first place trophy, what God wants is more than our hands, whether we wash them before dinner or not, God wants our hearts devoted to Him, and to follow Him in faith. Amen.

Let us pray:

Loving God, You created us in your image, yet we are different, but through faith in Your Son, Jesus Christ our Lord, we are to be One in You. Be with us in our walk of faith as we strive to walk in faith and grow in faith, each and every day. Help us in our journey to grow In love and in service toward You and one another. All these things we humbly pray in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. AMEN.