



Looking for a few grown ups

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When our three boys were young, there were times of mayhem in our home no greeting card company would ever want to capture. At those times, I would shout to my husband, “Someone around here needs to act like a grown up!” – and then I would leave the room.

As I look around the church today – whether represented in a home group, a church body or a denomination – it occurs to me that it’s time for someone around here to start acting like a grown up. But this time, I can’t leave the room. And neither can you.

As a baby boomer, I am aware that many of us have lived in a perpetual state of believing the “grown ups” are other than us. In fact, many of us thought the worse thing that could happen to us would be to grow up. We equated growing up with growing old, never realizing that only one of the two is optional.

This same avoidance mentality now exhibits itself clearly in many of our churches. From squabbles in our committee meetings to rifts in our denominations, we’re still waiting for the adults to take care of things. More serious than our emotional immaturity in this regard, though, is our spiritual immaturity. Long past the time we were allotted to think and act like babes, we’re still demanding attention and throwing tantrums when we don’t get our way.

Recently I had coffee with a friend, and we were remembering how the pastor we had in our younger years had told us, “God is love. You have to love each other.”

“It sounded so simplistic,” my friend said to me, toying with the muffin crumbs on her plate. “But I guess he was right.”

“Loving each other is probably the hardest, most demanding work we’ll

ever have,” I offered.

“And that’s with people we already like!” she cried.

We sat there, two middle-aged women feeling as though we had spent far too much of our lives sitting in the corner with a dunce cap on.

“God wants us to grow up ... like Christ in everything,” is how *The Message* states it in Ephesians 4:15a, and later in that chapter, “We are not meant to remain as children.”

That’s pretty clear. We have to grow up. Nowhere is this harder to accomplish than in areas of conflict. We are to be *peacemakers*, when mostly we’re just *peace-lovers* – to the extent that we’ll do almost anything rather than “confront one another in love.” Reconciliation is how we love one another with some degree of spiritual maturity, but sadly, the majority of us are still throwing blocks at each other on the nursery floor.

More than anything else, it is our lack of ability to “agree to disagree” that stymies and damages any real sense of community. The Presbyterian Church (USA) refers to it as “mutual forbearance” in its Book of Order. Civil discourse has become almost a lost art in a society where Don Imus and other “shock jocks” have so much sway in shaping the national conversation.

If we call ourselves Christians, then we’re called to act as Christians, and that means we must “love one another.” It may well have been the first verse

in the Bible we memorized as children. Yet here we are, still treating the teaching as though it is dependent upon our feelings. It isn’t, and we have to stop picking up our toys and going home – or to the church down the street or to the new splinter denomination.

The friend I had coffee with? I had not spoken to her in three years. She had hurt me; I had hurt her. I stewed in my self-righteous juices, pickling myself

in sadness, loneliness, regret. I had become bitter fruit, indeed. Hardest was the *dis-ease* I experienced in my relationship with God. In those years, I grumbled to God, complained, explained, defended. But I never once asked God to show me what to do – because darned if that isn’t what God will do, every time.

When I finally did turn to God, the answer was clear: Make peace.

You initiate. You apologize. Ask forgiveness. Personally, I have found God almost always speaks in two-word, action-packed, declarative statements. We’re the ones who add all the prepositional phrases and extended clauses.

By God’s grace, I did call her. And, in God’s grace, she came and forgave me. We have a long way to go to restore relationship. It may never be as close as it once was, and that will be my loss. But it’s a beginning.

I am also discovering it’s never too late to grow up. And now, it’s up to you and me.



VICKI M. KABAT

“Many speak and write of Christian community as though it were an easy accomplishment, and imply that the rest of us are overburdened with the matter and should not take ourselves so seriously. ‘All we have to do is love one another,’ they say, as though that were something that people are experienced in doing.”

Elizabeth O’Connor,

The New Community

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