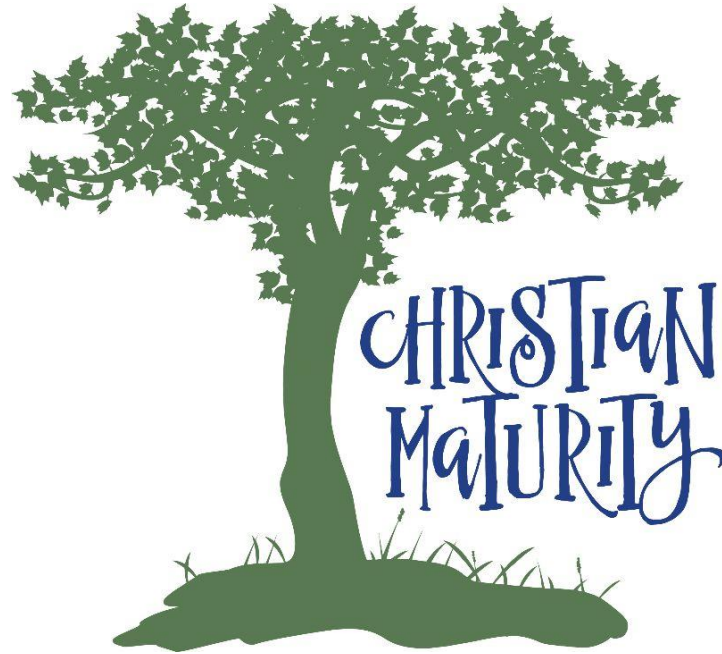


HEARTBEATS Staying Connected 4-30-21



Dear Friends in Christ,

I've written about some of the different ways or filters through which one can read the Bible. One is looking at the use of power—who has it, to whom does it move, how are the powerless empowered? Another is the restoration of relationships as healings and miracles restore individuals to their families and communities. Yet another is Jesus' elevating women to equal place with men, recognizing their faith and praising their contributions to society. Most recently, the filter has been looking at the questions Jesus asks and seeing them as questions for us, as well. Still another way is about the importance of leaving.

In Genesis 2, after God creates woman and the man recognizes her as a partner and companion, it says, "That is why a man leaves his father and mother and is united to his wife, and they become one flesh" (Genesis 2:24). (It's interesting to note that neither the first man nor the first woman had parents to leave, but the point is made for the rest of us that descend from them.) The New Testament speaks of this several times, including Jesus words in Matthew 19:5: "For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh." A seminary professor liked to say, "You have to leave before you can cleave." Leaving is a common theme throughout the Bible, but it is much more than moving out of the house and getting your own place, or about getting married. Leaving is about reaching the point of maturity where a person makes the decisions that accompany adulthood and individuality

One of the earliest stories of leaving is in Genesis 12, where Abram (who later becomes Abraham) receives God's call: "The Lord said to Abram, 'Go from your country, your people, and your father's household to the land I will show you'" (Genesis 12:1). Abram must make a decision that is much more than, "Should I move to a new place?" Abram must choose between

staying with his parents, his extended family, and his nation, or putting God first and following the instructions of God. Such a move will include leaving the family and societal traditions with which he had grown up, and opting for the practices with which God will present him.

Often, young people, usually within a few years of finishing high school, but for some much later, will reach a point where they will need to make decisions about how they are going to live. Sometimes that means rejecting church or faith because, “that’s what my parents made me do.” Hopefully, a time comes where a void is felt and recognition comes that it can best be filled by the faith that was given in youth. At this point, however, faith practices become the chosen behavior of the individual and not just something that is done because “that’s just what you’re supposed to do.” This is what the Bible talks about when it speaks of maturity of faith. This is what Paul speaks of in I Corinthians 3:2 where he writes, “I gave you milk, not solid food, for you were not yet ready for it.” Paul was saying that many in the church in Corinth had not yet reached a maturity of faith that allowed him to go deeper with them. In a sense, he was saying, “You haven’t yet left your home to follow Christ.”

Leaving is powerful and transformative. Much of what adolescence and later is about is reaching that point where the life you live is the one you have chosen. Most certainly, it can include the traditions and practices of family and society. True leaving, though, means that those choices are being made, not because of “what my parents told me,” but because “this is what I want for my life.” Leaving and reaching maturity can very much include the things that were important when growing up, but they have become integrated into one’s life apart from the idea that I’m doing this because this is what others expect of me. Real maturity, especially maturity of faith, comes when we can finally say, “I’m doing this because I know that this is what God wants.”

In Christ's love,

Pastor Jeffrey