Title: "A Child Forever"

Scriptures: Mk. 10:14-15; Heb. 11:1; Jn. 20:29; Mt. 16:13-23; Jn. 13:38; 1st Co. 13:4-11; Acts 2:22-23; Ephe. 4:11-15

 As Christians, We often hear and use the phrase, "a child of God".

 We call ourselves a child of God but have you ever really sat down and thought just what the implications of being a child of God are?

 One thing that struck me was that once you are a child you are a child forever.

 Not in a physical or emotional or physiological since, but position-ally.

 You see, in reality, if you are someone's child you never cease to be their child. You are their child forever.

 Example: our children...they grow up, they mature, they become adults, but even though they grow up, they will always be our children.

 They go from one stage of life to another but one thing that will never change is that they will always be our child.

 We go through much the same stages as being a child of God that we go through as a being a child of our earthly parents.

 From infancy through puberty and adolescence right on through adulthood.

 To become a child of God we have to start as an infant.

When Nicodemas came to Jesus with the question of how a man was to enter the kingdom of God, how a man was to become a true child of God, Jesus simply responded, “you must be born again".

No one becomes a child of God as an adult…

**Mark 10:14 (NIV) When Jesus saw this, he was indignant. He said to them, "Let the little children come to me, and do not hinder them, for the kingdom of God belongs to such as these. 15 I tell you the truth, anyone who will not receive the kingdom of God like a little child will never enter it."**

 The Kingdom of God cannot be received from a purely adult perspective You see, the adult perspective is; prove it to me! Show me the schematics of the thing. It has to make sense. I have to be able to understand it.

 The adult perspective is: I can do it myself.

 It is this adult perspective that keeps us from gaining entrance into the kingdom of God and becoming His child.

 Jesus said: **I tell you the truth, anyone who will not receive the kingdom of God like a little child will never enter it."**

 What is it about a little child that is so special here?

 It is their faith!!

 There is no faith like that of a little child.

 You probably don't remember but when you were an infant you had a tremendous faith!

 You were hungry, you had faith that someone would feed you... You may have cried to let your parents know that you were hungry but you didn't sit around and worry where the next meal was going to come from.

 You didn't worry that you might be out of pampers..

 Cry long enough and someone would change you. You didn't worry about where you were going to sleep, how the bills were going to get paid, how you would ever get to that Dr. Appointment or get to grandma's house!

 You simply had faith that your needs would be provided.

 Mom & dad told you something, you simply believed it.

 Example: Like being in the car and the dad snaps his fingers and the dome light comes on and he snaps them again and it goes off letting the kids think he is doing magic. They don’t see he is actually turning the switch with his other hand and they believe he has magic powers.

Jesus said: **I tell you the truth, anyone who will not receive the kingdom of God like a little child will never enter it."**

 This childlike faith, I believe, is best described in:

 **Hebr 11:1 (NIV) Now faith is being sure of what we hope for and certain of what we do not see.**

 A baby can't see or comprehend the "how to's" of their day to day needs, they just simply trust that their needs will be met.....

 That is the kind of faith that is essential for our entering the kingdom of God, to simply come by faith believing....

 I may not completely understand it or comprehend it but because you say its true, God, I believe and accept it.

 It is the adult in us that wants God to prove Himself to us first, before we believe. It is the adult in us that wants to see first then believe after...

**John 20:29 (NIV) Then Jesus told him, "Because you have seen me, you have believed; blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed."**

 It is only a childlike faith that can believe without seeing the absolute proof of something first....

 And Jesus said that it is only this kind of childlike faith in Him that will gain us entrance into the Kingdom of God.

 This is where being a child of God has to start...at infancy...whether we are 4 or 104 we need to approach God with the faith of a new born baby....

 Then we move on to adolescence, a time of spiritual puberty.

 If there is a time when it is hard to unconditionally love your child it is when they are going through this stage of life...the dreaded teenage years.

 It is then that most of the stupid things that we will ever say or do in our lifetime will manifest themselves.

 Example: When A couple gets married and wants to start a family, have you ever noticed that almost 100% of the time that they say things like; lets have a baby or we want to have a baby or God please give us a baby....

Have you ever noticed that no one ever starts out by asking for a teenager? There is a reason for that. Raising a teenager is something that you need to work up to..

Mark Twain once had some advice in raising a child as they approached their teenage years. He said when they turn12 years old put them in barrel and feed through knothole. When they turn 13, plug knothole!

 I wonder when we go through our time of spiritual adolescence if God gets as frustrated with us as we as parents do with our adolescent teen-agers?

The best example from Scripture that I can think of, of a child of God who is going through a time of spiritual puberty is Peter....

 One mark of adolescence is that one minute we can seem so mature and the next minute be just as immature.

**Matt 16:13 (NIV) When Jesus came to the region of Caesarea Philippi, he asked his disciples, "Who do people say the Son of Man is?"**

**14 They replied, "Some say John the Baptist; others say Elijah; and still others, Jeremiah or one of the prophets."**

**15 "But what about you?" he asked. "Who do you say I am?"**

**16 Simon Peter answered, "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God."**

**17 Jesus replied, "Blessed are you, Simon son of Jonah, for this was not revealed to you by man, but by my Father in heaven.**

**18 And I tell you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of Hades will not overcome it.**

 **19 I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven; whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven.**

**"20 Then he warned his disciples not to tell anyone that he was the Christ.**

**21 From that time on Jesus began to explain to his disciples that he must go to Jerusalem and suffer many things at the hands of the elders, chief priests and teachers of the law, and that he must be killed and on the third day be raised to life.**

**22 Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him. "Never, Lord!" he said. "This shall never happen to you!"**

 **23 Jesus turned and said to Peter, "Get behind me, Satan! You are a stumbling block to me; you do not have in mind the things of God, but the things of men."**

 One minute Peter is being praised for his maturity, the very next moment he is being rebuked for his immaturity...

We see Peter with his foot in his mouth more often than not during this time in his life....

 The night that Jesus is betrayed, He tries to prepare his disciples for his upcoming arrest and death on the cross and that where He is going they cannot follow...

 An impulsive Peter speaks up and says.... Lord, why can't I follow you? Lord I will lay down my life for you!

**John 13:38 (NIV) Then Jesus answered, "Will you really lay down your life for me? I tell you the truth, before the rooster crows, you will disown me three times!**

 Typical of adolescence...put a size 10 shoe in a size 13 mouth!

 That is why most of us really like Peter--we can identify with him. Been there--Done that!

 As a spiritual adolescent we can say and do some pretty dumb things.

 But spiritual adolescence is just as necessary and profitable for us as was our earthly adolescence...

 It is a natural part of the maturing process.... As long as we don't get stuck there--as long as we eventually move on to adulthood and then to maturity....

 If we don't it will cause big problems in our spiritual life..

 Do you know what one of the biggest problems in America is today? Adolescence!

 But not the adolescence of teen-agers but the adolescence of adults who refuse to grow up and take responsibility for their lives.

 Example: We have many 30-40 and even 50 year old teen-agers in our society. This is something that is unique to western civilization--primarily the U.S.

(What defines adulthood in America? drinking age, go to war, voting?

 Adulthood in America may be defined as right to get drunk, kill people in war and sit home on Election Day.

 Most other cultures have a specific time that a male passes from childhood to adulthood. We do not..

 Indians-have a specific time when their young men become a brave---- Jewish young men bar mitzvah when they turn 13—a passage from childhood into adulthood. It is at 13 that the boy puts away the toys and dad starts to teach him about the family business.

 **1Cor 13:4 (NIV) Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud.**

 **5 It is not rude, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs**

**6 Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth.**

**7 It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres.**

**8 Love never fails. But where there are prophecies, they will cease; where there are tongues, they will be stilled; where there is knowledge, it will pass away.**

 **9 For we know in part and we prophesy in part, 10 but when perfection comes, the imperfect disappears.**

 **11 When I was a child, I talked like a child, I thought like a child, I reasoned like a child. When I became a man, I put childish ways behind me.**

 At first glance v. 11 seems to be one that has been miss placed... like it really doesn't fit in where it has been placed in Scripture...( Skip verse 11 and go on to verses 10-12 and it really seems to flow better)

 Paul is talking about what real love, what Gods love, the love we are to have for one another is and then he slips in this verse about going from being a child to being an adult. What is the relevance?

**When I was a child, I talked like a child, I thought like a child, I reasoned like a child. When I became a man, I put childish ways behind me.**

 What does this have to do with what Paul has been talking about--Love?

 Take what Paul says about love and reverse them--Inpatient, unkind, envious, boastful, pride full, rude, self seeking, easily angered, keeps a record of wrongs...

 What picture do you get in your mind??

 I see a Child. Especially a teenager!

 Paul said: When I was a child, I talked like a child, I thought like a child, I reasoned like a child. When I became a man, I put childish ways behind me.

 There came a time when I determined to grow up! I bar mitzvah’d!

 We have no specific set time that is set aside for us to cross over from childhood to adulthood in our culture, and the result is, many don't make the transition.

 Probably the biggest cause of the breakdown in the American family is our tendency within this nation to not want to grow up.

 The biggest problem within the Church is the same thing. Christians who seem determined to stay in spiritual adolescence.

 That is the problem that Paul is addressing with the Corinthian Church.

Their spiritual immaturity, refusing to grow up. i.e. 1st co 3:1-2

 But even in our spiritual adolescence we are still a child of God... In our spiritual adolescence is when Gods grace is possibly the most abundant upon our lives...

God, like the most patient of fathers, gently instructs us, sometimes He may have to get tough with us, even discipline us.....But Scripture says that it is those God loves that He disciplines.

 But He wants us to move on to maturity, to grow up and become spiritual adults.

 Even Peter went through a time of spiritual adolescence but he did eventually grow up and reach spiritual adulthood.

 Jesus told the brash, adolescent Peter that before the rooster crowed, Peter would deny Him three times-- these words painfully came true and Peter found himself doing just as the Lord had said, and it crushed Peter when he found that he wasn't as mature in the Lord as he thought he was.

 But it was to be Peter’s spiritual bar mitzvah! As he worked through the pain of his denying Christ he did grow up and become an adult.

 The evidence of this is revealed to us as we read the words of Peter’s first sermon on the day of Pentecost...

 Fear of those who arrested Jesus was what caused Peter to deny even knowing Jesus three times after Jesus was arrested....

 Listen to Peters words as he was addressing some of the very ones who were responsible for putting Jesus on the cross just weeks before, the same crowd that he denied even knowing Jesus to because of fear....

**Acts 2:22 (NIV) "Men of Israel, listen to this: Jesus of Nazareth was a man accredited by God to you by miracles, wonders and signs, which God did among you through him, as you yourselves know. 23 This man was handed over to you by God's set purpose and foreknowledge; and you, with the help of wicked men, put him to death by nailing him to the cross.**

 What on earth happened to Peter? Where did this new found boldness come from?

 He grew up! He becomes an adult! He put his childish ways behind him!

 Peter goes on and does great and wonderful things for the Kingdom of God. Tradition teaches us that Peter himself goes on to be crucified on a cross for his faith.

 But guess what? Peter, even in his old age, was still a child of the King.

 Even though he grew up, even though he had reached adulthood, he was still a child dearly loved by God.

 Our children grow up and become adults, and we wouldn't want it any other way... But one thing that will never change, regardless of their age, is that they will always be our child.

 The same is true with God.

 He wants us to grow up and attain adulthood, to become mature and responsible adults in our faith--But one thing that will never change...we will always be His child--Eternally a child of God.

 We all become a child of God the same way.. the way Jesus told Nicodemus that we must... by being born again... Not a physical new birth but a spiritual new birth.

 And no one has ever been born an adult.

 Just as we are born--go through childhood--enter adolescence and then become an adult in the flesh...so we must go through these same stages in our relationship with God....

 Even though we will always be a child of God position-ally, It was never Gods intention for us to stay in spiritual infancy or adolescence forever ...

 But His will is that we grow up and become all that we can become in Him, reaching the full measure of maturity that He has for us in Christ Jesus.

**Ephe 4:11 (NIV) It was he who gave some to be apostles, some to be prophets, some to be evangelists, and some to be pastors and teachers, 12 to prepare God's people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up 13 until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature,**

 **attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ. 14 Then we will no longer be infants, tossed back and forth by the waves, and blown here and there by every wind of teaching and by the cunning and craftiness of men in their deceitful scheming. 15 Instead, speaking the truth in love, we will in all things grow up into him who is the Head, that is, Christ.**

 How would you describe where you are at in Christ this morning?

Are you --- An infant? A toddler? A adolescent ?

Or have you become an adult, one who has become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness that God has for you in Christ.

 Have you grown up to be a workman in the kingdom of God?

 Our Spiritual maturity and adulthood has very little to do with our age.

 I have seen 60 year old babies in Christ and 16 year old mature adults in Christ.

 Is it your desire to be all that you can be in Christ? To acquire the fullness of what God has for you?

 We will always, by position, be Gods Child--

 But God wants us to become adult children who take on the responsibility of taking over the family business.

 Is it time for your spiritual bar mitzvah this morning?

**When I was a child, I talked like a child, I thought like a child, I reasoned like a child. When I became a man, I put childish ways behind me.**

Prayer... Lord, may it be our desire be to grow up and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ.

 May we leave our childish ways behind us and become the men and women of God that you want us to be. Whether we are 10 or 110...