

Little Timmy was unusual for a baby. You see, he showed no interest in growing. Oh sure, he was hungry all the time and he would move about, but after those initial motor skills and vocal cords developed, well he just sort of stagnated. He never moved past a liquid diet, never showed any interest in learning to walk or talk. He just played with his toys, was content to let his parents feed and change him, and communicated by screaming.

Seems a little unbelievable, right? And if I were to tell you that nothing changed for Timmy as he became 5 or 10 or 20 years old, well then you'd definitely know I was making this up, right? The idea of a human being that doesn't mature and grow as they age is absurd. If it didn't happen, the parents would have him in to all kinds of doctors to see what the problem was and to get him moving along as normal a development path as he could manage. This kind of refusing to grow up just would never be tolerated in a normal human child. So God, through the author to the Hebrews today, asks us why we ever tolerate this kind attitude when it comes to our spiritual growth. <Read text: Hebrews 5:11-6:3>.

Last week in our gospel Jesus began his discourse on the Bread of Life. The food that we need to truly survive. Earthly food spoils and fades, we eat it and we are hungry again. But heavenly food fills for eternity. Heavenly food lasts forever. God feeds us both body and soul, and we learned that we can't be content with just earthly bread, we need the food that will keep us alive forever. Though we are born dead to him, God freely offers us this food that will make us alive, the truth of his word, the truth of a crucified savior who takes away our sin and brings us to life in him. We need to feed on that more than anything else, because that will keep us alive with our Lord forever.

The author here takes that analogy one step further. He tells us we must also not let ourselves be content with just milk, a liquid diet like only an infant would have. Milk alone is only for babies and God wants us to grow in our salvation and our faith in him, to become mature spiritual adults. Sadly, too often, we consider this an option part of our faith-life.

Look again at the accusation that the author levels against his readers here and ask yourself honestly, "Could he just as easily be saying this to me?" He tells us, "**Though by this time you ought to be teachers, you need someone to teach you the elementary truths of God's word all over again.**" (v12). Many of us are life-long Christians. We have had entire lives to learn and grow in God's word. Has that growth happened, or have you been content with a liquid diet? The author says these readers ought to be teachers already. If you've had a lifetime to get to that point, how about you? Putting aside things like a fear of public speaking, do you feel confident enough in your spiritual understanding that you could teach a Bible Instruction Class to a new member? I'm not talking about deeply complicated spiritual truths, I mean the basics of Law and Gospel, sin and grace. The principles of the Ten Commandments, the meaning of the parts of the Apostles' Creed, the Lord's Prayer and the Sacraments? Could you do it?

Or have you, instead of growing, done a backslide? If I were to call you all up and have a good old-fashioned confirmation examination with the lot of you...how many would pass? Not any trick questions, not crazy terminology, just the truths taught us in the chief parts of the catechism, the essentials that are considered a basic requirement for Christian faith. Again, the Commandments, the Creed, the Lord's Prayer and the Sacraments. Not "do you have them memorized", but do you know what they mean? If you're thinking you want a chance to cram a little before that test, then the author here might be talking to you. Rather than laying a solid foundation of the essentials and building on it through our lives, instead the foundation itself is crumbling and breaking apart.

Ask yourself, where else would that kind of attitude be tolerated? The child that refuses to grow would not just be left to it. The student that knows *less* at the end of the year than when he started would not just be passed to the next grade. The worker who is *worse* at his job than when he was hired would not be able to keep that job for long. And every one of those examples is utterly trivial compared to the importance of our eternal salvation. Not growing there is a far more serious problem, not growing spiritually is far more dangerous.

After all, consider the troubles that you would face by remaining a perpetual baby. Perhaps the obvious is that you are completely helpless and totally dependent on others. When you need something, you're totally at the mercy of someone else doing it for you. If you were hungry, all you could do is wait until someone feeds you. Wouldn't it be better if you could reach the cupboard and make something for yourself? If a predator comes along, you'd be utterly defenseless. Wouldn't you rather be able to run or even stand and fight? And as you wander through your world, you are completely clueless about what is safe and what is dangerous. Wouldn't you rather know that you shouldn't stick that fork into the outlet?

All of these things are the same if we remain spiritual infants. If we are in need spiritually but are only infants, we have no idea how to feed ourselves. In a time of emotional crisis, wouldn't you rather know yourself where to turn in God's word for comfort and support rather than having to wait for someone else to bring it to you while you suffer? When

the devil comes prowling after you, do you want to remain easy prey that he can lead astray with a few clever words, or would you rather be mature in your faith that you can flee him or even fight him with God's word? And as you live your life here, the world is full of subtle dangers to our faith that we can't recognize by nature. Don't you want to know what will damage your faith so you can avoid it?

But perhaps the largest drawback to remaining an infant is just how selfish and emotionally unstable we remain. After all, what happens when a baby wants something and doesn't get it that instant? Might be food, might be a toy, might be something he wants to go away and stop. But as soon as things aren't perfect he cries. He screams. He is miserable and he lets everyone around him know it. It doesn't matter if the situation will be resolved shortly, he doesn't know that. Doesn't matter if what's happening is for his own good. He doesn't care and he can't understand. Is that how we want to live spiritually? Do we want to be so caught up in ourselves that we can only be at peace and happy when everything is going our way? And the moment something we don't like happens, it ruins everything? We fail to accept there are things going on we can't see or know about, we fail to trust that our Father loves us and is taking care of everything right now. We refuse to be happy (or let anyone around us be happy) until everything in our lives is how we want it to be. When it's not, we complain and moan and lash out at others instead of realizing that there is a larger world going on than what we can perceive.

Living as a spiritual infant is both highly dangerous and incredibly miserable. We need to recognize it where it exists so we can change it. Of course, as full-grown human adults it can be very difficult to admit that we're acting like babies. It means giving up a lot of pride. But once we admit it to ourselves, then God can begin helping us grow into something much better. We can move on to solid food from our Lord and mature into a spiritual adult. An adult that is everything the infant is not. Able to do for himself. Able to recognize the spiritual dangers in this world and defend against them. And most importantly, one that trusts the invisible hand of the Father in all circumstances, and is able then to remain content and trusting despite all outward appearances. When things don't happen how we think they should or they don't go our way, we don't need to be selfishly upset or jump to negative conclusions. Rather we can remain content as we look to see if there is anything we can do to improve the situation, not to satisfy ourselves, but to build up the entire kingdom of believers, for the benefit of all.

It's a much better way to live, isn't it? Who here would say they would rather stay a fussy baby than being an adult whose peace and strength is truly found in the Lord? This is something we all need to pursue regularly. This is something I personally want for all of you. But to do that, we need to stop feeding on just milk and move on to the solid food. That doesn't mean we cut milk out of the diet, we never outgrow the basic nutrition we need as infants. But we add to it as we grow. The Lord has this food for us, and he wants to give it to us, but we have to feed on it.

Now, I don't want to sound legalistic here, but generally speaking, you're not going to find this solid food of the Lord just on Sunday mornings. Twenty minutes of his word once a week, if that, that will probably keep you going, but it's almost certainly not enough to make you actually grow. It's going to take more than that. It's going to take devotion time at home. Study time at home. It's going to take study with others, study here at church. And guess what? "I don't have time for that," isn't even close to a valid excuse. Remember week before last? We talked about how God gives us everything we have so that we would have some to return to him in joy? The same is true of our time. Just like our monetary offerings come first out of what God graciously gives us, so also with our time. Your time for the Lord needs to come first, be scheduled first, decided first, and the Lord will see to it that you have enough after.

Now, to be a little practical for a moment, perhaps you want to do this, perhaps you have wanted to for some time but you've no idea where to start on your own. Maybe you're even a little embarrassed that you don't know where to start. You're not alone. In fact, you're probably the majority. I wasn't raised being taught how to do these things. Even in my training for the ministry I wasn't given clear direction on how to study God's word regularly until much later on in my education. Everyone just assumed everyone else knew it. But that's not true anymore. It's okay to ask for help. And there are quite a few resources available to help with home study and devotion, not to mention our own regular Bible Classes that will be resuming in just a few weeks. All designed to help you feed on the solid food so you can grow to maturity in the Lord.

Of course, as the author reminds us here, we need to build on a solid foundation. We shouldn't have to keep re-laying that foundation over and over, but if ours is a little shaky right now then perhaps we need to start there. You're not too old to do this, you haven't been a Christian too long that it is embarrassing. Don't let pride stand in the way of starting over from the beginning to make sure that foundation is as strong as possible to build on. Bible instruction classes are held regularly. Ask about them, join in on the next one, refresh yourself on the core teachings so you can have a solid foundation to build on going forward. Luther found it necessary to review the parts of the catechism every morning. We should always make sure our foundation is secure. We are never so mature that we shouldn't inspect our foundation and

never so fully grown that we have nowhere to go from here. The spiritual growth of a Christian does not end during this life.

All this we can and will do, as the author says here, so long as God permits. We pause here to remember that this is all in God's hands. We cannot grow our faith without him. Jesus is the bread of life we must feed on. His word is how he feeds us. The Holy Spirit works through that word to mature us. Our strength in our spiritual adulthood is not our own, but our strength is that we have grown to rest on God's strength alone. Our peace and confidence as spiritual adults is not in our own abilities but a trust in the love and power of the God who died to redeem us. We grow, but we remember it is the Lord who truly does all the work here.

Only God can feed our faith and only God can cause us to grow. But in his love and grace to us, he has promised us that he *will* do these things. He wants to see you grow. He wants to feed you in his word. He has promised that through his holy word he *will* do this. It is the Lord who does it and wills it, but he has promised it to us through his holy word. Just as our God wants you saved, just as he wanted to die in your place, so he wants to see you grow into a mature Christian like any parent would want to see his child grow. To grow, we need to be fed the right food and God will always provide it, he will always nourish us through his word. He will always give us access to his word, he will always provide time to learn from it. Look to the food you need, and feed well on it every day so that you can grow strong in the Lord.

Amen.