

**NCC Seminarian Ann Aaberg presented this sermon on Sunday, 5 September 2004 in Marshfield Hills, Massachusetts. It is based on Luke 14:25–33.**

## Adults Only

HAVE YOU REACHED ADULTHOOD YET? With all four of our children reaching various milestones this past year, it's made me think more about how we as a society mark when we have become adults and how unrealistic that might be.

For instance, I remember when our children reached eighteen, the new freedom to body pierce appeared to be much more exciting for them than the freedom to vote. When they turned 21, the new "adult" behavior now available to them actually seemed rather childish. And two of our children have graduated from college and are struggling to achieve financial independence and – between you and me – I think sometimes they'd rather be kids again.

I came closer to adulthood myself this summer as I discovered a new way to measure it.

I attended the funeral of a dear family member, Helen Curran. Helen was married to and is survived by my mother's cousin, whom we always called "Uncle Jimmy." I approached Uncle Jimmy after the funeral at the restaurant where he and his children were holding the reception. Jim is now in his early eighties and bound to a wheelchair. I hadn't seen him in a couple of years – since the last family funeral – and I was unsure whether he would recognize me.

Well, he most certainly did, and despite his grief, still exhibited his quick sense of humor – promptly telling me a Pope joke when he learned I had started seminary! We visited for awhile and then I left his table to join my cousins at another table at the back of the room.

All my cousins and I have by this time buried both our parents and as we sat there eating and visiting, I came to realize that Uncle Jimmy was the last living blood relative we had left from his generation. Later, when he wheeled himself over to our table to join us, I noticed all of us "kids" hanging on his every word as he reminisced about our parents and our grandparents and their siblings and which one of them came to America first and sent to Ireland for the next. One of my younger cousins was actually taking notes on her napkin....

On the 2-hour drive home from Springfield, I thought about my mother and father and all the aunts and uncles who had now gone home to God

and it struck me that Uncle Jimmy was the only one still around who remembered when I was born....the only one left who referred to me as "little Ann" to differentiate me from my mother. It was at that moment that I settled on a new definition for adulthood. I decided adulthood happens when there's no one left on earth who can remember when you were born.

In looking around the garden this morning, it appears we may have some adults here. At first glance, this definition seems like a sad one, but if we look a little closer and reflect on our scripture reading this morning, it may actually contain quite a bit of hope!

In many bibles, our passage from Luke today is subtitled "The Cost of Discipleship." Jesus is telling us to think ahead and think hard about what it takes to be his disciple. We are told that at this point large crowds were traveling with him and that he turned to talked to them. Perhaps he overheard a conversation in the crowd behind him and decided he had better stop now and clarify! Don't be blindsided, he tells us, don't think you can enter into this half-way like the builder or the king who comes up short. In order to become Jesus' disciple, we need to give it all up – our relationships, our possessions, our very lives.

I was relieved to see that Matthew's version of this story uses softer language than the word "hate" and says "whoever loves father or mother or son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me." And I find the contemporary translation from the Message even easier to understand, which says, "Anyone who comes to me but refuses to let go of father, mother, spouse, children, brothers, sisters – yes, even one's own self! – can't be my disciple." And the Message ends the passage with: "Simply put, if you're not willing to take what is dearest to you, whether plans or people, and kiss it good-bye, you can't be my disciple."

Well, this may have made sense for the early apostles because we know they left jobs and family to follow Jesus. And this may be all well and good for certain orders of monks or nuns who enter monasteries and convents and leave all their possessions behind and have limited contact with their families, but how do we live out our faith with this one? So many of Jesus' teachings tell us not to get hung up on acquiring things, urging us to place God above all our stuff, to give away to others what we don't need. We struggle with that, especially in our consumer-oriented culture, but we get it, we understand it. But what of our dear parents, siblings, our children? Esther de Waal in her book *Seeking God*, reminds us that all that is created is God-given, on loan to us. The precious people we have all loved and who have gone before us were beautiful gifts from God, on loan to us until God took them home again.

As Uncle Jimmy accepted condolences from the people around him this summer; after he lovingly referred to his wife Helen of more than 40 years as "a good ol' gal"; after he replied to some that he thanked God she was no longer suffering, he looked over at me and said, "Ann, everything in this world is fleeting."

Yes, everything in this world is fleeting. The summer flies by, childhoods are over in a blink, the roof you put on the house 25 years ago needs to be replaced already. But here is where we can view Jesus' words this morning as the BENEFIT of Discipleship, not just the COST. If we can grasp that all is God-given, on loan, fleeting, even our very lives, we can begin to appreciate every minute we are alive, every moment we spend with the people we love, every chance we have to discover the beauty of this earth and the creatures who live upon it.

We can let go of the false sense of control, the obsession, the hanging on to things. We can shake off the shackles of this world and become liberated to follow Jesus Christ, and to come to know without a doubt that God's love is not fleeting, that it has no end. And here's the bonus: we remain forever children because there will always be someone who remembers when we were born. Remember God's words from the hymn we sing at Confirmation? "I was there to hear your borning cry. I'll be there when you are old."

My dear Church family, Jesus is reminding us again this morning that his kingdom is not of this world. Heaven and earth will pass away but his words will never pass away. Yes, the commitment is difficult and the costs appear out of our reach, but the benefit is no less than the eternal peace and comfort found only in following Christ. So in the sadness and struggle we all face as we become adults in this world, know that we are always sitting in the lap of God, children of God forever. Amen.