

Sermon for Sunday, August 23rd, 2020

Pastor Stephen Reynolds

Ephesians 4:11-16

Staff Dedication Weekend

Installation of Pastor Michael Schram & Principal Jim Van Dellen

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

Michael Jordan-Most of you have heard of him, even if you aren't a basketball fan. Jordan rose beyond the game of basketball to international celebrity status as he won multiple Most Valuable Player awards and six NBA championships. What most people don't know or have forgotten is what led up to Michael Jordan being regarded as arguably the greatest basketball player of all time. Prior to his six championship seasons, multiple awards and international notoriety, Jordan had a foil, a nemesis, an opponent to overcome-the "Bad Boy" Detroit Pistons. When Jordan's Chicago Bulls met the Pistons in the playoffs, the Pistons had special defensive "Jordan Rules" that they put in place-Anytime Jordan would drive to the hoop, someone from the Pistons would be sure to knock him down, elbow him, foul him hard or any combination of these three, At the end of their first two playoff series, Jordan's body was so broken down because he had taken such a brutal beating. Michael Jordan realized that he would have to strengthen his body to a point where he could withstand the pounding that the Pistons would place upon him, and did so, eventually leading to his first NBA championship.

St. Paul speaks this way in Ephesians 4-It's time to grow up, to become mature, to grow into the head that is Christ. This is held in contrast to what we were or even are now- "so that we may no longer be children, tossed to and fro by the waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by human cunning, by craftiness in deceitful schemes." These are things to be left behind. We as God's children are not meant to live and act like physical children, seeking to fulfill our

desires as if they were the only thing that matters and serving only ourselves and our personal interests. We are called to not be deceived by every wind of doctrine-Pastor Schram mentioned last week how the Mormons affirm that Jesus is “a son of god”-It sounds good, and even vaguely biblical, and yet it is a fine example of “every wind of doctrine” because it means something far outside the biblical confession of who Jesus is.

One of you asked me recently how I was enjoying West Bend. I responded that I really am, despite all the goings on and limitations with COVID. One thing I said is that I appreciate the fact that West Bend is big enough to have a Menard’s, a Home Depot and a Fleet Farm, so I can get the best prices for all the stuff I need for our new home. It was a perfectly consumeristic answer-I can get what I want from what I want it at what price I want it. I’ve heard folks talk about church and spirituality and faith the same way- I like to take what I like and not the rest. I like this about church but not that. Now lest you think this is a “young person” problem, it’s rampant everywhere in the church across all generations-We have been discipled by our culture to be consumers who feel as though every felt need and every desire is to be affirmed, celebrated and met in some way by whatever institution we associate with, and if we don’t always get what we want, go find it somewhere else. Brothers and sisters, this is the height of spiritual immaturity, and the Lord would have us leave this way of life behind.

It’s often said that maturity doesn’t come through easy times but through hard ones. Easy times often lead to lives of comfort, slumber and spiritual immaturity because they don’t force us to change. But challenging times often bring about growth in ways we do not expect. Michael Jordan experienced some brutal times before coming out on top. Our current circumstances have imposed a hardship on us that we haven’t seen. Activities have been curtailed. Some of calendars have been upended, and we haven’t been able to fill our lives with all of the things we’d like to. Perhaps God has used this time to remind you of the things that are actually important and what really isn’t. Perhaps the

Lord has used the mask mandate to remind you that it's not about your or your thoughts or politics about masks, but rather the needs of your neighbor.

Dave Ramsey is a prominent figure in the personal finance world- We've been privileged to offer his financial peace course here at St. John's and hope to do so again. Ramsey is fond of saying that "maturity is the ability to go without now so that you will have something greater later." So, brothers and sisters, what is the Lord asking you to leave behind? Unwholesome talk? Idle chatter on facebook or other social media? A life lived only in service to yourself? What might the Lord be calling you to go without as you grow up?

In the midst of these questions, I do want to also remind you about what you are called to grow into. Paul puts it this way: "until we all attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to mature manhood, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ..." We are called to grow up in such a way that our lives resemble more and more that of our savior Jesus. Maturity in Christ Jesus comes as we recognize Christ's call in our lives to serve as he served. Maturity comes in being so rooted in Christ and his promises that you are assured that nothing will separate you from the Father's love. Maturity comes as you recognize Christ's eternal promises are infinitely more important than the fleeting idols of this world. Maturity comes as we recognize that the Lord works through hardship to strengthen and bless us. Maturity comes as we recognize the call in our baptism to serve wherever Christ has stationed and placed us.

This weekend at St. John's we will formally install Pastor Michael Schram as he continues to serve in care ministry. We will formally install Jim Van Dellen, our new school administrator, as he embarks on his first year at St. John's-and what a year to lead our school! We will dedicate our leadership and teaching staff to the work of the Lord at St. John's in the strange yet wonderful time. But notice what Paul says-¹¹ And he gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the shepherds and teachers, ¹²**to equip the saints for the work of**

ministry, for building up the body of Christ." These leaders who the Lord has raised up to work among us are not to do the ministry here- They are not the only ones engaged in the work of the Lord. They are to equip you and I to do the ministry wherever God has placed you.

I asked in our poll question this week who was the most profound influence on your faith. Two thirds of you said a family member was most significant person in your life of faith-only a quarter of responses said a church worker. Now, both are important and ways that the Lord works. However, it is the entirety of the baptized people of God that has an opportunity and responsibility to undertake the work of the Lord-These leaders are here to equip you to do it, but they are not the only ones engaged in ministry.

To close, I'd like to invite to think of a time in your life where someone sat you down and had a significant conversation with you about life and your faith. I can think of several times, whether with parents, grandparents, pastors, a boss and a supervisors. It may have taken a tougher tone, especially if you were a little bit knuckleheaded like me, or it may have been softer, perhaps some gentle encouragement. In all of these times, the ministry of the Lord is getting done. He is bringing his people to maturity, to know and become more and more like our Lord Jesus Christ.

As the Lord works through pastors and teachers and parents and friends and in our households and church family, He is bringing us more and more to the knowledge and maturity of know Christ Jesus. As we grow in faith, we more boldly profess His promises applied to us in our baptism-that we are forgiven, beloved children. As we grow, we are assured of His presence and His promises even in the midst of an election season and pandemics and persona and community hardship. As we grow and mature, we leave behind the vain things of this world and look more and more to the day when the eternal promises of God come to final and full fruition. Thanks be to God for bringing us to maturity through His Son, our Savior, Jesus Christ! Amen! .

