



Mercy, Redemption and Growing Up

By The Rev. Jarrett Kerbel (2/27/26)

“... until we all attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to maturity, to the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ.”

-Ephesians 4:13

“I hid in the clouded wrath of the crowd
When they said, ‘Sit down,’ I stood up
Ooh-ooh, growin' up.”

-Growing Up by Bruce Springsteen

Growing up is a primary task of human life and one that is life-long. For followers of Jesus, the horizon of our growth is Jesus. Could there be a more inspiring and challenging objective for our evolution?

A cause for gratitude in my life is the example set by my parents. Kent and Carol showed me how people can mature across the decades into the best version of themselves. Witnessing each of them leave behind character flaws, negative behaviors, and vices while growing into greater integrity, virtue, empathy, graciousness, spiritual freedom, gentleness, and all-around positivity showed me that I could do the same with God's help.

My core conviction is that God - like the prodigal sower in the parable - spreads a super-abundance of opportunities for growth in our lives. Another name for God's ever-present offer to receive us is mercy. God only wants us to flourish, thrive, and mature into the full stature of Christ. To that end, God deftly leaves *open doors* and *invitations to enter* in every experience of our lives. No matter how challenging or bleak the moment, God is present with God's foot in the door, inviting us to enter deeper into our with-God life.

During Lent we throw ourselves on God's mercy, on God's eternal will to receive and restore us, so to evolve in our spiritual freedom- that inner grace which allows us to recognize and pivot toward what God is offering in any moment.

A careless driver may provoke me into anger. Instead, by grace, I wonder with empathy about how his or her day is going and what struggles they may have in life. Someone may say something offensive in my presence and my unredeemed humanity may want to lash back and fight. Instead, by grace, I show curiosity and ask about the values the person brings to such a statement. With God's help, I pivot away from self-righteousness and toward relationship formation across differences.

In New York City, my church ran a very busy day center for people experiencing homelessness and hardship. We offered food, fellowship, safety, showers, activities, and mail boxes to our neighbors. When a new person entered our ministry, we sat down with them and explained the rules and norms. No raising your voice, no verbal or physical fighting, etc. The group was made up of traumatized people, addicted people, mentally ill people who struggled to self-regulate; our goal was to make them partners in a secure communal space where all could feel safe and heal.

Our approach was fundamentally redemptive. When a person broke a rule, we sat down with the person and reviewed the rules and had a loving but frank discussion about what happened, why it mattered, responsibility, and consequences. The whole conversation was governed by the goal of restoring this person to healthy functioning in our community, which is redemption. Our faith directed us to believe that each person - given the grace and the opportunity - could pivot to a better version of themselves no matter the challenges they face.

Let us all embrace a redemptive vision of life in our institutions, communities, and families. Let us pray that we are able to work with God's extravagant providence of opportunities to pivot our lives toward growth and grace. May our justice be merciful and restorative. May our accountability be wrapped in love and hope for redemption- not because we believe in some unaided human ability to pivot, but because we believe in God's power to invite us all back to God. No one is beyond God's influence; we call that influence love.