

Column – Ebenezer

“Kids Say the Darndest Things” was an American comedy television series. Lacking the sophistication to filter what they said, children often told stories that made people laugh . . . with perhaps the exception of their parents.

If kids say the darndest things, they also *think* the darndest things. When my nieces were small, the morning after my mother, their grandmother, had died, I went to their house to collect her clothes to take to the funeral home. As I got ready to leave, I said: “I need to be off and take MaMa her clothes.” No sooner had I spoken these words, their eyes got big as saucers and the elder said: “Uncle, are you going to heaven too?”

Well, it made perfect sense. Their mother had told them that their grandmother had gone to heaven, and now I was taking her clothes to her. Needless to say, the adults in the room could not help but smile.

Another example comes from my own childhood. When the hymn “Come thou fount of every blessing” was sung at church, I understood “Here I raised my Ebenezer” at the beginning of the second stanza to refer to raising one’s voice in praise to God. Only as a young adult did I discover that “Ebenezer” referred to a great stone the Old Testament prophet Samuel set up as a memorial following God’s deliverance in battle with the Philistines. 1 Samuel 7:12 concludes with the meaning of this name: “Hitherto hath the Lord helped us.”

Both of these – my nieces’ misunderstanding of my words about taking clothes to their grandmother and my misunderstanding of “Ebenezer” -- point to St. Paul words in 1 Corinthians 13: “When I was a child, I spake as a child, I understood as a child, I thought as a child: but when I became a man, I put away childish things.”

Speaking and thinking as a child is fine in the first few years of life. It is part of growing up. The tragedy would be if growth were arrested and we remained children in terms of our understanding of spiritual things.

If individuals no less than the Christian community – the Church – are to flourish and bear effective witness to Christ, there must be growth. This growth, moreover, does not just happen. Just as children don’t automatically acquire a knowledge of the multiplication tables, the ability to read or the skill to make

cogent arguments, just so spiritual babies do not become articulate and productive members of Christ's body. Effort under the direction of the Holy Spirit is required.

What might be some of the things which bring about this maturity? Regularly attending services of public worship where God's Word Written is opened and faithfully preached would be a start. Others would include privately reading and studying the Bible (getting the big story firmly planted in our heads), drawing on the resources of those who have gone before including the early Church Fathers, the Reformers of the 16th century and scholars of recent times, attending classes offered in Lent and other times by the local church, and acting on those things about the faith that are already known and understood.

“Grow up, go out and speak clearly” is the clarion call to Jesus' people today. The times demand it.

ALMIGHTY God, our Heavenly Father, who hast committed to thy Holy Church the care and nurture of thy children; Enlighten with thy wisdom those who teach and those who learn; that, rejoicing in the knowledge of thy truth, they may worship thee and serve thee from generation to generation; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen. (Book of Common Prayer)

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