

Today's Message: Advent 1 – December 3, 2006

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“The Boy Who Would Not Grow Up”

Once upon a time, there was a boy who never wanted to grow up. In fact, he was rather determined not to grow up. He looked at his older brother and sister, and noticed how they had to get up early, before the sun even woke up. They obviously didn't like getting up so early, and neither did he.

Mom would tell them, “Hurry up, or you'll be late for the bus!” And they would complain bitterly about having to go to school. But, snuggled up in his warm bed, the boy didn't have to worry about school, or grades, or big kids picking on him on the playground. “I'm never going to grow up!” he vowed.

Yet he did. And he had to get up early, before the sun awoke. And he had to make the bus, and worry about grades and big kids on the playground. It wasn't as bad as he thought, because he liked some of his subjects, and some of his teachers, and recess, and lunch, and he had lots of friends, though he was always sure to complain, “I don't want to go to school. I want to stay in bed!” Sometimes he would even pretend to be sick, so he wouldn't have to go – especially when there was a test.

And he worried. He worried about growing up. “I'll never grow up!” he would say, as he looked at his father and mother, who had to get up and go to work every morning, and came home tired every night, and who worried about bills, and who worried about him when he would get sick, and about whether his friends were good examples or not.

Being a grownup didn't seem like much fun, and so he went outside and played stickball, or drew with chalk on the driveway, or traded baseball cards with his friends down the block, and he vowed, “I'll never grow up!”

Yet he did. He went off to college, and met a girl, and they got married, and soon he had a job, and got up early in the morning, and came home tired. They had two children, and he worried about money, and about the children getting sick, and about whether the kids friends were a good example or not.

It wasn't so bad, because he loved his wife, and his job, and his kids – although he was always sure to complain. And sometimes he would even pretend to be sick, so he wouldn't have to go to work.

And he worried. He worried about growing old. “I'll never grow old!” he said to himself, as he looked at his parents, now getting older, and his grandparents who were, indeed, old, and had trouble with their eyes and backs, and who had failing memories, and seemed to live in the past more and more, and less and less were able to do the things they always loved doing.

He thought of himself as old, and it scared him. Being old didn't seem like much fun. So he vowed never to be old. "I never want to grow old," he said.

But he did get old, anyway. His kids grew up and moved away. He developed a bad back, and had to have cataracts removed from his eyes. His hair turned gray and some fell out, and he found the past easier to talk about than the future. And sometimes he would forget, and that was frustrating.

It was impossible to do some of the things he used to love to do, like sledding, and jumping in piles of leaves. But he loved his grandchildren, and enjoyed having time to travel, and enjoyed being with his wife – just the two of them, until one day she passed away.

At her funeral, the pastor talked about what a remarkable woman she was, and how much she loved life, and how she had always looked forward to things – to growing up, being married, having children, having grandchildren, and how she had even looked forward to this moment – being with her Lord. And, he said, now all of her dreams would come true, and her hopes would be realized, in the arms of the Lord who loved her from the very beginning.

And the boy, now grown old, sat there. And he thought about these things – about this beautiful woman he had lived with for almost fifty years – so full of joy – this marvelous person – that he never really knew. And he thought about dying. And he thought about the hopes that he had never realized, because he was so afraid of growing up. And he wondered why he was always worrying so.

And then he thought about being in God's arms. And he worried about that, too. He worried that God might not keep his promise to love him. He worried that maybe he wasn't good enough. He worried about whether there was, in fact, anything at all beyond the grave. And so he made one more vow – he vowed that he would never die.

Now, before you judge that boy too harshly, consider whether you also have made that vow, whether you have come to grips with the fact that your time will also come. And, if you have, whether that knowledge fills you with fear, or fills you with hope.

Jesus said that, while many search the stars, trying to discern what evil lies ahead of them, the faithful disciple knows that, when things get truly bad, it is only a sign for them that God is nearer than ever, for he will not leave his children comfortless. And that is what Advent is about – the coming of the One who loves us, and who will never leave his children comfortless or without help.

Then Jesus goes on to say: “Be on guard, keep alert; for you do not know when the time will come. Do not be weighed down by the worries of this life. Pray for strength as you live your lives, no matter what fate comes your way.”

And the grace and peace of our Lord Jesus Christ will surround you all the days of your life.