

**Notes for Children's Talk & Sermon Outline for  
Sunday, 11 October 2020**

# Children's Talk: Understanding Adults

- We've been talking about different stages of life.
  - 2 weeks ago I talked about children.
  - Last week Mr. Glenn talked about teenagers.
  - Today, I'm going to talk about adults.
- What do you think about being an adult?
  - When I was a kid I remember thinking it would be cool to be an adult.
    - To do important things.
    - To be able to drive a car.
    - To be married.
    - To be able to earn your own money and be able to just go out and buy ice cream for yourself if you want to.
  - And it is cool to be an adult; there are a lot of good things about being an adult to look forward to.
- I also want to give you a little bit more understanding of what it's like to be an adult so that you can understand a bit more about what life is like for your parents or other adults around you.
  - What do you think it's like for you mom to be an adult?
  - What do you think it's like for your dad to be an adult?
  - Or your teachers in school?
    - Is it easy for them? Is it hard?
    - Is it fun? Is it no fun?
- I know that when I was growing up I sort of thought of my parents as always having been adults.
  - I had seen photos of them when they were younger and I knew that they had once been babies and children and teenagers but somehow I thought of them as being their adults selves in a child's body, or something.
  - But when you become an adult it can feel like the opposite of that.
    - You still feel like the kid or teenager that you were before but somehow you now have an adult body and adult responsibilities, even though you still feel like a kid on the inside.
    - People my age, in their 30s, often joke with each other and say things like, "I'm not ready to be an adult. This adult thing is hard. Why would they let me be one? I'm not ready."
- The point is that when you become an adult you are not done growing up.
  - Adults have a lot of things to figure out still.
  - And adults change a lot in their adulthood.
  - They might look largely the same but people change a lot from when they're in their 20s to their 30s, 40s, 50s.
- Let's now look at a story about a big turning point in Moses' life and see what we can learn from that about what the Lord wants us to do in the adult stage of life.
- You remember that Moses had had to run away.
  - He went to a place called Midian.
  - He got married there and had some children.
- And then he had the experience we're going to read today.

- Exodus 3:1-7, 10-12 (Kempton Project Translation, modified)
- <sup>1</sup> Now Moses was tending the flock of Jethro his father-in-law, the priest of Midian. And he led the flock to the back of the wilderness, and came to Horeb, the mountain of God. <sup>2</sup> And the Angel of Jehovah appeared to him in a flame of fire from the midst of a bramble. So he looked, and behold, the bramble was burning with fire, but the bramble was not consumed. <sup>3</sup> Then Moses said, "I will now turn aside and see this great sight, why the bramble does not burn." <sup>4</sup> So when Jehovah saw that he turned aside to look, God called to him from the midst of the bramble and said, "Moses, Moses!" And he said, "Here I am." <sup>5</sup> Then He said, "Do not draw near this place. Take your sandals off your feet, for the place where you stand is holy ground." <sup>6</sup> Moreover He said, "I am the God of your father—the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob." And Moses hid his face, for he was afraid to look upon God. <sup>7</sup> And Jehovah said: "Seeing I have seen the oppression of My people who are in Egypt, and have heard their cry because of their taskmasters, for I know their sorrows. .... <sup>10</sup> Come now, therefore, and I will send you to Pharaoh that you may bring My people, the children of Israel, out of Egypt." <sup>11</sup> But Moses said to God, "Who am I that I should go to Pharaoh, and that I should bring the children of Israel out of Egypt?" <sup>12</sup> So He said, "I will certainly be with you. And this shall be a sign to you that I have sent you: When you have brought the people out of Egypt, you shall serve God on this mountain."

- Moses was an adult.
  - He had a job; He had a family.
  - But the Lord was not a big part of His life until this moment.
- The Lord appears to Moses in a flame of fire in the midst of a bramble bush.
  - A bramble bush is tangled, rough, prickly bush and adult's minds can often feel like a whole tangle of different things.
    - Things are not all clear and easy for adults to understand.
- Still the Lord manages to talk to Moses and gives him an important job.
  - There's a big problem that needs solving—the Children of Israel are in slavery.
- Did you hear what Moses says, though?
  - He says, "Who am I to go do that important job?"
    - That's how adults feel too—they have a lot of doubts.
    - They ask themselves, "Who am I to do this important job?"
      - "Who am I to think that I could be a good parent?"
  - And as the story goes on Moses actually argues with God for quite a while, trying to convince God to pick someone else to go.
  - But then Moses eventually agrees to go.
- I hope this helps you understand the adults in your life a bit more.
  - You could ask them, "What do you like about being an adult?"
    - Or, "What has been hard for you about being an adult?"
- And you can even support them in being good adults.
  - If you see them trying to be a good person, appreciate that.
  - If you see them trying to be more religious and do family worship with you or prayers with you, support that, don't go against it.
  - If they're trying changing things up in how you do things at home, don't fight against it, try to make it work together.
- This world relies on adults doing their jobs and being responsible for lots of other things.
  - Try to understand the adults in your life and do what you can to support them. *Amen.*

# Stages of Life, Part 3: Adulthood

A Sermon by Pastor Malcolm G. Smith  
11 October 2020

## Intro

- Our story for this week starts with Moses, on his own, in the wilderness.
  - He had a new life and a new family but he was hundreds of kilometres from where he had grown up and he said, "I have been a sojourner in a strange land" (Exodus 2:22).
- We're talking today about the adult stage of life.
  - And when we first enter adulthood we can feel much like Moses—a visitor in the strange land of adulthood.
  - We almost feel like asking, "Is *this* what adulthood is?"
    - We sort of expected it to feel different.
  - We can imagine Moses sitting alone for hours, watching the sheep and thinking about the seemingly random sequence of events that brought him to where he was and asking himself, "Is this what I'm going to do with my life—spend all my time watching sheep?"
- The teachings of the New Church say that Moses' time in the land of Midian means a time of "simple good" in a person's life (*Secrets of Heaven* §6773).
  - We're not caught up in the slavery of self-absorption like we were as teenagers but we also didn't ever really deal with the issues that were at the heart of that.
    - The Children of Israel are still enslaved in Egypt but, like Moses, we're not really thinking about that right now.
  - "Simple good" means that we're just trying our best to do the right thing from a general sense of what's right and wrong.
    - We don't have a particularly developed belief system.
    - If someone were to ask us what we believed about this issue or that issue we could maybe come up with some response but we're not really sure what we believe about a lot of things or *why* we believe what we believe.
  - This is a fine state for us to be in for a while—it's a part of our development.
  - But the Lord has bigger plans for us.

## A Bramble, Burning With Fire But Not Consumed

- As we read in the Children's Talk, one day, when Moses was busy shepherding his flock, he saw something extraordinary—a bramble bush that was burning with fire but was not burning up.
- The teachings of the New Church explain that the bramble bush means our knowledge of the literal sense of the Word.
  - And the reason why our knowledge of the Word is depicted as a tangled, thorny bush is because....
    - *Secrets of Heaven* §6832.
      - ...when the Lord appears to people He does so in a way suited to the kind of people they are, for a person cannot receive the Divine in any way other than that which is a way suited to the kind of person he is....
- When we first reach adulthood the Word can be something of an impenetrable tangle for us.
  - There are all these bits and pieces of stories and teachings that we know but they're not organised in our minds yet.

- But still, sometimes, that seemingly disorganised tangle can be on fire.
  - Sometimes a story or quote from the Word has a warmth and light about it for us.
  - It touches our hearts.
    - It resonates with our experience in a deep way.
  - We have a feeling of experiencing a deep truth that always has been true and always will be—a fire that’s not going to go out.
  - When this happens the words from the Bible go from being a story about some people thousands of years ago to being words about our lives right now.
  - The bush is on fire.
    - And it’s a fire in which we can feel the warmth of the Lord’s love and care for us.
  - Something in it gets our attention and tells us that we need to give it a second look, to take the time to really think about it and reflect on it, not just move on with the rest of our day.
    - Maybe you’ve had an experience like this or maybe you can now be more on the lookout for something like that.

## Turning Aside to Look

- Moses saw this bush burning but he could have kept going and not stopped to really look at it.
- But instead he said, “I will now turn aside and see this great sight, why the bush does not burn” (Exodus 3:3).
- And then it says, “when Jehovah saw that he turned aside to look, God called to him from the midst of the bush....” (4).
  - If we don’t turn aside to look more closely when we have one of these experiences, then the Lord can’t speak to us any further.
- But, if we *do* take the time to turn aside to look, then the Lord can speak to us in a way that could change our lives.
- And there are lots of ways that we can turn aside to look.
  - We can put our To Do list on hold for a little while, or go for a walk by ourselves to think, or take some time to read further in the Word, or write some thoughts down.
  - This is very connected to the first thing that the Lord tells Moses to do—take his sandals off because he’s on holy ground.
    - We have higher thoughts and lower thoughts.
    - Our feet and our shoes mean our lower thoughts.
    - So when the Lord commanded Moses to take off his sandals He was telling Him to work to put aside his lower, time-bound, worldly thoughts and concerns and start thinking about higher things, eternal things.
  - We need to take those external thoughts off for a bit to try to keep our minds on that higher level.
    - We don’t need to think about what we’re going to get for lunch right now.
    - We don’t need to quickly check our phone to see if that email that we’re waiting for has come through yet.

## The God of Your Father

- Ok, so let’s say that we do everything right:
  - We have an experience of something from the Word touching our heart.
  - We turn aside to look by taking some time to sit and read the story again and think about it.

- And we take off our sandals by clearing some mental space to think about higher things.
- And then we're sitting there with the Word in front of us.
  - What does that feel like?
- Jehovah says to Moses, "I am the God of your father—the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob."
  - And it says that "Moses hid his face, for he was afraid to look upon God" (6).
  - It can be intimidating to sit with the Word in front of us.
    - We can feel out of place or like we're faking it.
    - That book isn't ours.
      - Sometimes even the physical book is one that our parents or one of our friends lent to us or gave to us.
      - Even if it's our own copy of the book, it can still primarily feel like the book our parents or friends read and want us to read—not our book, not our God. It's the God of our fathers.
    - And we can want to hide our face because we have no idea where to start.
      - Who are we to feel like we can read the Word for ourselves and pretend like we know what it means?
- Moses may have grown up hearing stories about what God did for Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob but this was his first experience with God for himself.
  - We can also hear lots of stories of people's range of experiences with God and religion and the Word but it's something entirely different when we are considering the possibility of interacting directly with God for ourselves.

## **Making Faith Our Own**

- This leads us into talking about one of the crucial parts of the adult stage of our spiritual development.
- The main thing that distinguishes adulthood from the stages of life that came before it is that, in adulthood, we can move on from the faith that we've borrowed from our parents and other people.
- Here's a short quote from the passage we read in the first sermon of this series that outlined the stages of life.
  - *Secrets of Heaven* §10225:5.
    - The [stage of adulthood] is called a state in which understanding exists because the person now thinks for themselves, drawing distinctions and arriving at conclusions; and the conclusions are theirs, not another's. At this time belief begins; for belief is not a person's own until they have confirmed what they believe with ideas that are the product of their own thinking. Till then the belief is not theirs but another's within them; for till then they trust in the person, not in the matter of belief.
  - It's important for us to think through the things that we've grown up believing and see whether we believe them for ourselves.
    - But the Lord doesn't want us to stay in this intellectual process for too long because that won't develop our faith on its own.
- The passage I just read from continues

- *Secrets of Heaven* §10225:5 (cont.).

- [T]he state in which understanding exists begins with a person when not their teacher's but their own ideas constitute what they think, which does not happen until the inner levels of the mind are opened towards heaven. ... [A]nd how far they are open depends on how far the person leads a life looking to heaven and not to the world.

- Trying to *live* what we believe is where we really make it our own and so the Lord gets straight to the point with Moses, even though he was hiding his face.

- He says, "Seeing I have seen the oppression of My people who are in Egypt, and have heard their cry because of their taskmasters, for I know their sorrows. ... Come now, therefore, and I will send you to Pharaoh that you may bring My people, the children of Israel, out of Egypt" (7, 10).

- If we really take the Lord's Word to heart, He will ask us to do things for Him.

## **Moses Objects to Being Sent**

- When the Lord tells Moses to go lead his people out of Egypt, Moses objects much like we would if somebody told us to go lead a revolution against one of the most powerful countries in the world.

- Moses says, "Who am I that I should go to Pharaoh, and that I should bring the children of Israel out of Egypt?" (11).

- And God's response? "I will certainly be with you. And this shall be a sign to you that I have sent you: When you have brought the people out of Egypt, you shall serve God on this mountain" (12).

- We don't have time to get into the details of what this means but the basic feeling of it is clear: God will be with us and it will happen—God says, "*when* you have brought the people out of Egypt" not *if*.

- But Moses objects again, "But suppose they will not believe me or listen to my voice; suppose they say, 'Jehovah has not appeared to you'" (4:1).

- It's one thing to have an experience like this; it's another thing entirely to tell other people about it or to change our behaviour because of it.

- We can very easily start to doubt for ourselves whether what we experienced was real.

- Jehovah responds to Moses by giving him some signs or miracles to do to convince them.

- And Moses objects again, "O my Lord, I am not eloquent, neither before nor since You have spoken to Your servant; but I am slow of speech and slow of tongue."

- And Jehovah says, "[G]o, and I will be with your mouth and teach you what you shall say" (4:12).

- And Moses objects again—he's out of excuses so he just begs, "O my Lord, please send by the hand of whomever else You may send" (13).

- In the story Jehovah gets angry at Moses but tells him that He will send Aaron to do the talking for him.

- As a very quick and rough explanation, Aaron is the truth from the Word adapted to our lives.

- He speaks for Moses to the people.

- He bridges that gap.

- And in our lives we get this material that helps bridge the gap from sermons or reading books or talking to other people.

## The Pattern of Adult Life

- I love how much Moses objects.
  - It just feels accurate.
  - And, to be fair, he was being asked to do a huge thing.
  - Is the Lord asking you to do something that feels huge and way beyond your capacity to do?
- Eventually Jehovah convinces Moses to go.
- Let's quickly review what happens next.
  - Moses meets up with Aaron and they go and talk to their people and show them the signs and the people believe and worship.
    - Everything goes according to plan.
  - They go tell Pharaoh that their God says that he should let the people go.
    - And Pharaoh doesn't agree. And that's Ok because God said that he wouldn't.
    - But then Pharaoh decided that they have too much time on their hands and so makes the Children of Israel's work even harder.
    - And so the people are really angry at Moses and so he says to God, "Why did you send me here? I've just made things worse for the people."
  - Eventually Moses is told to do his signs for Pharaoh as proof.
    - But then his magicians can also do the same signs.
    - That's not the way it was supposed to work!
  - Then Jehovah starts doing more and more amazing plagues on the Egyptians and after a while the magicians can't do them anymore.
    - And finally after the last plague Pharaoh lets the people go!
    - Mission accomplished, right?
  - Except that then they get to the Red Sea and the Egyptians come chasing after them with horses and chariots and the people wish that they were back in Egypt.
    - And then the Lord saves them by having them cross the Red Sea on dry ground and then drowning the Egyptians in the sea.
    - Then the people sing a song to celebrate the Lord saving them.
  - And then God leads them into the wilderness, heading towards Mt. Sinai to receive the 10 Commandments.
    - But within a couple of days the people are murmuring against Moses because they don't have any food and they wish that they were back in Egypt.
- Are you starting to notice a pattern here?
  - This is the way it goes on throughout Moses' life.
- Isn't it a lot like adulthood?
  - We keep thinking that when we finish this thing or that thing or get to a certain point, that *then* we'll be happy.
  - But then we get there and there's more work to do.
  - Or something else happens that makes us have to readjust all our plans.
    - Over and over and over again.

## Would it Be Better If We Never Tried?

- I wonder if Moses could have known all that he would have to deal with along the way, whether he would have ever agreed to go.
- When things don't work out according to plan we can feel like talking to the Lord the way Moses does or the way the people talk to Moses.
  - "Why did you bring me here? I told you that it wouldn't work. It would have been better if I hadn't even tried and just left things the way they were."
  - And when we get in that mode we tend to forget what the Lord's role actually is in all of this.
    - He's not the one messing things up; He's the one leading us out of slavery and keeping us alive and safe in the wilderness and showing us the way to the promised land.
  - He didn't call Moses because He wanted to make Moses' life difficult; He called him because the people were suffering.
    - He looks on our lives and the lives of the people around us and says, "I have seen the oppression of My people who are in Egypt, and have heard their cry because of their taskmasters, for I know their sorrows" (Exodus 3:7).
  - The Lord understands a whole lot better than we do the slavery that we're in and the many other things that will attack us on our way out of Egypt to the promised land.
    - He can see how we are suffering because of self-absorption, the desire to be better than other people, pettiness, the desire to get back at other people, lust, etc.
    - He will do all that He can to lead us out of that, even if we object and refuse and make excuses and want to give up.

## Conclusion

- Growing up is hard work, no matter how old we are.
  - There is intellectual work that is required—working out what we believe for ourselves, not just borrowing our beliefs from others.
  - But, more than that, there's also work that requires a change of heart.
    - A shift from just caring about ourselves and our own future to seeing the suffering of the people around us and caring about them too.
    - A shift to seeing the problems of the world as not just other people's problems but our problem's too.
    - That was a big shift for Moses and a big shift for the disciples when the Lord sent them out to help other people, way before they felt ready for the job.
- I wish the path of adulthood were more linear and obvious.
  - Do these simple things and things will get better and better for you and for everyone.
- But adult life and adult faith requires a lot more than that.
  - It requires wracking our brains to try to figure out how to respond to really difficult situations.
  - It requires showing up and doing our best in the face of a lot of doubt and uncertainty, when we might want to run away instead.
  - It requires failure and getting up again after failure and trying again.
  - It requires huge amounts of humility and huge amounts of courage.
- And it can feel awfully alone.
  - No authority figure to simply tell us what to do.
  - No one there to keep us from messing up badly.

- But, of course, we are not actually alone.
  - There are other people alongside of us also trying to do the work of being good adults serving the Lord—like Moses had Aaron to help him and the disciples had each other.
  - We have people our same age and people older than us and younger than us to learn from.
    - If you can find people to share the journey with you who share your values it can make a huge difference.
- And we are not alone because the Lord will also be with us.
  - He said to Moses, “I will certainly be with you” (Exodus 3:12).
    - And “I will be with your mouth and teach you what you shall say. .... [A]nd I will teach you what you shall do” (Exodus 4:12, 15).
  - And He said to the disciples, “Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations.... and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age” (Matthew 28:18-19).
- We can do what the Lord calls us to do as adults because, just like He was with us every step of the way through the previous stages of our lives, He will also be with us every step of the way through adulthood and on—every step of the way—to eternity.
- *Amen.*