

It is good to be back at Fairfield. I was in Chicago last weekend speaking at a conference. **Took the family with me and on our way home on Sunday morning we stopped at the Navy Pier to sight-see and while there bumped into Jonathan and Rafia Chenoweth and little Rania.**

I said, "Why aren't you in church?"

They said, "We could ask you the same question."

So it was a stand-off, which ended with us promising not to rat one another out.

I told them their secret was safe with me.

They had lost power in last Friday's storm and decided it was a good time to visit Chicago, where they had electricity.

All this rain and lightning and wind. This past Wednesday, Danville received four inches of rain in two hours. **White Lick Creek ran over its banks and kicked up its heels in the town park, which the police department closed down.** But I grew up in that town and know the secret way into places, so Sam and I went down there to see the creek. **Our town commentator and historian was down there, taking pictures.** He's kind of an odd duck, but he knows everything that's ever happened in our town and has an opinion about it.

I asked him when was the last time the creek was that high and he said, "April 19, 1957." **He said it with such authority I was impressed and thought well of him, but then he said, "God did this. This is God's judgment. This is God's handiwork."**

It's a little quirk of his. I've known him all my life. **He was my first Sunday school teacher, but it was a small church, so I had him from kindergarten all the way up until I was a teenager and became a Quaker.** He has a very simple explanation for all of the world's ills. He blames God for everything, and if it's not God's fault, then someone else is to blame, but never himself. **Lot of people like that.**

We've been talking about maturity, using as our Scripture Jesus's counsel to his disciples to be perfect. Matthew 5:48. "Therefore be ye perfect, as your Heavenly Father is perfect." **That word *perfect* more accurately translates to mean *mature*, so that's been our working definition.** I came across a really fine description of the word *maturity* this week, given by a Jewish rabbi and psychologist named Edwin Friedman, who wrote a wonderful little book called *A Failure of Nerve*, in which he defines *maturity* as *the willingness to take responsibility for one's own emotional being and destiny.* (p. 8)

Maturity then says two things: “I am responsible for how I feel.”
And “I am responsible for my future.”

Let’s review where we’ve been. We’ve said mature people are ***self-regulating***. They have the ability to live within appropriate boundaries and control themselves without others having to do that for them.

We’ve said mature people have the gift of ***perspective***. They have the ability to give situations and circumstances their appropriate weight.

We’ve talked about ***delayed gratification***. Mature people are able to postpone immediate pleasure for some future good. We remembered the quote from Elton Trueblood, that a mature person is “someone who plants a tree under whose shade he’ll never sit.”

And today we’re going to think about maturity as the willingness to take responsibility for one’s own emotional being and destiny.

Before I met Joan, I had dates with lots of girls, but could never talk any of them into more than one date. **When we moved back to Danville, Joan started meeting these women, and they would tell her, “I went out with Phil once.”** She always had the feeling they were felt sorry for her.

But I remember one girl going out with me more than once. **In fact, we went out for several years, then broke up, and I was devastated.** She started dating my best friend and I became angry and behaved poorly. So for quite a long time I stomped around in a foul mood, convinced my life was ruined, depressed one moment, mad the next. Always saying the same thing, “They make me so mad.”

Boy, that felt nice. To behave poorly, and blame all my problems on everyone but myself. **What a luxury that was!** Finally, I can't remember who, but it was probably one of my parents, said, “Hey, Phil. You choose how you feel. Stop blaming your feelings on other people.” **The little light bulb inside my head clicked on, and I thought, “Yep, I'm the one who controls my thinking. No one else. How I feel is up to me.”** Now I don't always remember that, but that doesn't mean it isn't true. But think how often we give other people the power to determine our mood.

Have you ever found yourself saying something like this?

“Oh, he makes me so upset.”

“Boy, she really drives me crazy.”

“Man, I don't know what it is about them, but they bring out the worst in me.”

“If it weren't for them, my life would be so much better.”

Maturity says, “I am responsible for how I feel, for what I think, for how I act. No one else. How I feel is a choice I’ve made.”

So maturity is accepting responsibility for one’s own emotional being. **And accepting responsibility for one’s destiny.**

My high school class held its first reunion, five years after we’d graduated. I got an invitation in the mail, but didn’t go, because I was embarrassed. **My friends had gone to college, graduated, and had good jobs, and I was in a job I didn’t like that didn’t have a future.** So I was embarrassed, and sometimes I’d even get mad, thinking about my circumstances. I’d be mad at the economy (Do you know how hard it is to be mad at an economy?), then mad at the President (It’s easy to be mad at Presidents.), then mad at the company I worked for, then mad at my friends who’d gone to college.

I thought everyone else was responsible for my future except the one person who could do something about it—me. **And when that finally dawned on me, I accepted responsibility for my destiny, quit my job, and went to college.** It took me 23 years to learn that, and sometimes I still forget it.

I want to say something else about that. When it comes to ourselves, we should remind ourselves that we are responsible for our destiny. **Because if we don't hold ourselves accountable to that, we won't have a future.** So we have to tell ourselves, "My future is my responsibility, a direct consequence of the choices I've made and the actions I've taken." **When we say that to ourselves about ourselves, it can have a powerful, motivating effect.**

But....we have to handle that great truth carefully when it comes to other people. **Because it can blind us to the very real hardships some people have encountered in life.** It would be the unkind to go to someone who had rotten parents and was treated cruelly or was mentally impaired and say to them, "You are where you are because of the choices you've made."

It's one thing to be tough on ourselves, it's another thing entirely to lose all sense of compassion and smugly pretend all of us started in the same place. **You know some people were born on third base and think they hit a triple.** We don't want to be like that.

So I tell myself that my future depends on me, and that has a motivating effect, but I know some people will try hard and never get on base and that's not always their fault.

So maturity means accepting responsibility for one's own emotional being. **And accepting responsibility for one's destiny.** But it also means having empathy for others whose situation hasn't been as fortunate as our own. We'll talk about that next week.