

- Will you join me in prayer? Lord, speak to me that I may speak in living echoes of thy tone. Amen. I have just been reviewing some correspondence between a man and a group of his friends with whom he was having serious disagreement. And I find that this man has been able to do something that few persons are able ever to do. He could speak his mind, frankly, while at the same time he cultivated the affection of those whom he was criticizing. He wrote them a series of letters in which he spoke strong, severe statements. He rebuked them repeatedly, stating some very sharp things that must have cut deeply into their souls. Yet these letters I have examined contain also a gentle tone and a very brotherly spirit. Now, the man of whom I speak, as you may have surmised from what I have just said, and from the reading of the scripture lesson by Dave Sims earlier in this hour, that the person of whom I speak now is St. Paul. On Dad's Day, it is perhaps not out of order that we study together St. Paul's correspondence with an unruly church in the Greek city of Corinth. This series of letters that we have in our new testaments is not unlike the correspondence between fathers and sons in our own America today. For the great apostle looked upon his Corinthian Christian friends, really as his children, often quite unruly and now going through the experience of growing pains. They were seeking a maturity. Maturity never comes easily. It is a lonely virtue. Men spend their lives seeking it. Truly these Corinthian Christians had not found it at this time. They were a tiny band of persons truly interested in the faith they had learned from St. Paul. but truly a weak body, nevertheless, only loosely organized and full of blunders. St. Paul had lived among them for, perhaps, 18 months. This was three or four years earlier. He had won them as converts to the Christian faith and way, but now he had moved on to another city. And with Paul away from them, they were having troubles. Corinth was a city located on a tiny neck of land, perhaps only four miles wide, connecting the Northern section of Greece with the Southern section sometimes called the Peloponnese. On this narrow isthmus, the city was built where the traffic of great commerce tramped back in forth from north to south and south to north every day and where sea traffic likewise traveled from west to east and east to west. In that busy atmosphere, a struggling handful of Christian converts was almost entirely lost. Moreover, in a very prominent place in the city's life, geographically and sociologically and religiously speaking, was a mighty institution known as the temple of Aphrodite, Goddess of Love, the center of corruption, where 1,000 so-called priestesses applied their trade daily and nightly. The band of Christian converts were contaminated. St. Paul heard something of their troubles. Reports came to him while living in Ephesus and he could not restrain himself. He sat down and wrote a series of letters, the letters being carried to Corinth in the midst of some personal visits. He was preparing to go for what the New Testament refers to as his third visit. And also in the New Testament is a fragment of what scholars call the stern letter. He had tried a variety of approaches. He had tried gentleness and a bit of prodding. He had endeavored with cajolery and a bit of irony to rebuke them. And now in this particular letter, he spoke sternly and rebuked them for their yielding to the idolatry and immorality of Corinthian life. He rebuked them for their inner strife and division. He rebuked them for their own criticisms of his behavior and attitude. And then very close to the end of this so-called stern letter, he inserted a gentle yet firm admonition. I want you to catch it. In the quite brilliant JB Phillips translation of verse nine or the second half of verse nine of chapter 13, St. Paul says to these Corinthian Christians, what you need is to grow up. Or as the JB Phillips translation puts it, my ambition for you is true Christian maturity. True

Christian maturity. I cannot escape remembering on Dad's day, that across America, there are unnumbered fathers who say to their sons with some regularity, boy, when will you grow up? I cannot escape feeling this morning that across America, there are citizens of our own land dreaming of the day when in governmental life and community life as well as in church affairs, America will grow up. I am likewise persuaded that across the Earth today, peoples we call strange and foreign are asking with considerable seriousness, not to mention anxiety, the question, when will America grow up? I am encouraged a bit. There is some evidence that America is at long last interested in mature living and behavior. One bit of encouraging evidence came this last summer with the publication of the Rockefeller Report on Education. Many of you have seen the original copies. Some of you have seen the printed publication in booklet form, and others certainly have seen the report of it in the magazines and the rather outstanding editorial, which appeared in Life Magazine early in July. The Rockefeller Report on Education has the caption, the pursuit of excellence. A reference is made to the traditional human rights declaration that is so basic in our American life. A reference is made to life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness. What says the Rockefeller Report? We are proposing now a complimentary right, the right to pursue excellence. Now for the rest of my time this morning, let me describe sketchily four meanings of maturity for the consideration of Americans who might per chance be interested in the pursuit of excellence. For Americans who are not quite content with mere happiness hunting, with mere security and peace of mind and convenience and luxury, who are not merely interested in getting a college degree and in having a delightful weekend called Dad's Day, but who are concerned that individually and by families and as students and faculty and parents and patrons, and as citizens likewise, we pursue steadfastly this goal, excellence or to return to St. Paul's phraseology, the lonely virtue of maturity might become for us an ambition. And we might join him in declaring to ourselves our ambition is true Christian maturity. Now, I begin with the obvious. Maturity, declares St. Paul in the Corinthian correspondence, includes the ability to discuss candidly one's differences with his fellows. That was what St. Paul was doing. He criticized the Corinthians for their immorality, for their party divisions, for their own yielding to temptation in that tremendous wicked city where they lived. They, in turn, had criticized and were criticizing him. They talked about his poor appearance. They spoke of his lack of skill as a speaker. They particularly said a critical thing or two about his interest in money alone. "All you want of us," they said, "is the money we contribute to the causes "in which you're interested. Moreover, they compared him with certain other speakers and representatives of Christ's cause among them and said of him, "Really, Paul, we're not greatly impressed "with your brand of the Christian faith. "You really do not believe in Christ as others do." And so St. Paul was able, candidly, to give an answer to their criticisms and at the same time to criticize them and be quite severe as he did so. Yet he won their affections. And he put it in writing. To put your strong sentiments in writing is often risky business. When a careless driver puts a crimp in the fender of your car, you can tell him off and your action will be looked upon as mere letting off steam, but to write him a threatening letter makes the affair much more serious. You can whisper sweet nothing's in your date's ear, and your behavior is looked upon as delightful pastime, but to put the same sentiments in a letter results in the loss of your fraternity pin. All of us know very well that a businessman may write a very caustic letter to a competitor, but he must always tear it up. He never mails it. It is bad business to mail a threatening or caustic letter of any kind. Well St. Paul was able to do it. He put it in writing and he came him out with this saying, "I want you Christians in Corinth to grow up. "My ambition for you is true Christian maturity." Could America, do you think, achieve sufficient maturity that we could discuss controversial matters intelligently, with honesty of purpose, with chief interest in light and no interest in heat. I was quite thrilled, even excited,

two weeks ago tonight in a church in Atlanta to listen to a preacher who was speaking on a controversial subject. His subject for the evening being, is divorce a solution? He gave light to his interpretation. I was curious about some other subjects in the series of sermons. And so I inquired and I learned that tonight, just two weeks from the night I heard him, he was to discuss the question, is segregation biblical? And just one week later, he had announced for his subject, are capital and labor helping capitalism become Christian? I think that's a mature approach. It excites me to discover that one clergyman at least is able with that mature approach to present to his congregation some light and helpful thought. Incidentally, the church was packed almost in the way our church here this morning was packed to hear that sermon. The second item I mentioned as a meaning for the term maturity from St. Paul's letters for the consideration of Americans interested in the pursuit of excellence, may be stated as follows. Maturity means a readiness to display patience amid disappointment and discouragement. I am sure St. Paul must have been out of sorts with those Corinthians at times. It's perfectly obvious that he was if you read certain sections of his correspondence and yet he was patient with them and sought to commend to them the virtue and value and appropriateness and necessity for patience. Another term for this particular thought might be the word fortitude. Never allow a momentary defeat or a postponement of action to take from you your sense of purpose and your steadfastness of purpose. America is in the era when she will have to cultivate the virtue of patience. A short list of the areas where patience is needed might be made such as the area where we struggle across the Earth for freedom. We talk about freedom. We print learned statements, scholarly statements about it. We print popular statements about it. We discuss it in drawing room and across the family dining table. But alas across the earth, there are people who are not free and the day of full freedom is yonder in the distance in an unknown era. We do not know when it will be achieved, But does that mean we abandon our effort? It does not. It means with patience and steadfastness, we continue to labor for it. Or take the battle for education. We are in an era when we have interest to be sure. We are building new institutions and trying to strengthen older ones and yet across this continent, particularly, and in other sections of the Earth as well, there is a vast deal of anti-intellectualism, well organized, powerfully established, and strongly motivated giving us great resistance. Or take the ideal of brotherhood from New Testament days until hours, we've dreamed of it. And into our democratic America, we've put this concept. We've written it there, indelibly we think, and yet no real brotherhood is present among us. Does that mean we abandon our labors? It does not. It does mean that we must have patience not to stop, not even to feel discouraged. The third meaning from St. Paul's correspondence with the Corinthians concerning maturity is maturity means a willingness regularly to engage in self-examination. In another verse of this 13th chapter of Second Corinthians, verse five, St. Paul says to those Christians in Corinth, I want you to test yourselves. I want you not to apply any easygoing and surface-like test. No popular poll among yourselves concerning sentiments. I want you honestly to search your heart, each of you. And then as an institution, as a body, I want you with seriousness to examine, for a very definite purpose, examine yourselves to see whether you are holding on to your faith. It was another way of reminding those Corinthians of the seriousness of abandoning one's faith. It was largely because they were not full of faith, that they were tempted and that immorality and corruption had crept into their ranks. The church in Corinth was called to be a distinctive institution in Corinthian life. They were not asked to adjust to their environment. Adjustment to one's environment is not the Christian way and it's not the way of maturity. The key term in the text I'm using this morning is the word perfecting, or again, the word maturity, depending upon your translation of the Greek word. St Paul said, "You must not adjust and compromise and adapt. "Rather you are to offer your

distinctive testimony "in that pagan and wicked atmosphere of Corinth." And the best way to be distinctive is to be natural, to be what you are expected to be, what you're called to be, to be what God wants you to be, namely a Christian witness. I dream for you. My ambition for you is true Christian maturity. No cheap imitation of any other faith, no posing as if you possess something you do not have, but true Christian maturity. Well, this same quality is greatly needed in our time, in my home and yours, in our university, in our government, in the Christian Church, our role is to be what under God, we are distinctively called to be. All this bother and concern upon us to imitate so many others is both dangerous and wicked. Oh, America when at long last will you cultivate and achieve such maturity that you can be yourself in the family of nations? To be mature, involves the willingness to examine and test one's self at that point. And finally and quickly, maturity means self-sacrifice for a cause greater than self. Those Corinthian people were chiefly interested in themselves. They were demanding too much for self. In another part of this correspondence, St. Paul lifts high the concept of the cross, and challenged them to cross bearing, which essentially is self-forgetfulness and self-emptying. I recall at the moment, the story spoken of by Myron C. Wiki, who was counseling a group of so-called crusade scholars from several oriental countries a few years ago, and into his council room, there came a Korean boy and a Japanese boy, Myron Wiki reports the following testimony from the lips of the Korean student. Looking to his Japanese colleague, he said, "You know, when I first came to know you, "I was suspicious and bitter. "I remember that it was soldiers from your country "that bombed my country and took the lives "of my family and neighbors. "I determined to hate you. "But now after these weeks of Christian fellowship with you, "I have come to the conclusion that it is more important "to be Christian than it is to be Korean." Quickly, I come to the very core of our American life today and ask, is it a farfetched dream that America could someday be mature enough, not merely to lift the symbol of the cross before the conscience of mankind, but literally to become a cross bearer and as a great gigantic cross bearer, get beneath the load of humanity in this difficult era and literally swing the human race upward toward peace, toward brotherhood, toward the city of God. That I am persuaded would be mature living. Let us pray. May the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ and the love of God, the Father, and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with you all.

- As a Jewish family gathers around the Passover festival table to partake of its symbolic foods and participate in the traditional service or Seder, the youngest of the celebrants will put to the oldest four questions, which are part of one question. "Why is this night "different from all other nights?" he asks. "Why do we eat only unleavened bread tonight? "And why only bitter herbs "and why dip them in salt water "and why recline about the table?" "I'm glad you asked the questions you did," replies the leader, "for the story of this night "was just what I wanted you to know." And so the child's questions about the meaning of the symbolisms of the feast are the cues for the leader to retell, once more, the story that has been retold countless times for 30 centuries. The old, old story of the mighty acts of God in delivering his people from bondage, in directing their exodus and their wilderness years of finding themselves, in giving them a land where they were to dwell in faithfulness to his commandments. These remembered mighty acts of God are an outward and visible sign of a continuing inward and spiritual grace pervading their history. As God called them forth, made his will known to them, forgave their rebelliousness and brought them to a new self-understanding as his covenant people. For you are a people holy to the Lord your God, Deuteronomy reminded them. The Lord has chosen you not for your numbers or righteousness, or you were few and rebellious, but out of love, It is of his love and faithfulness that he has brought you out with a mighty hand

and redeemed you from the house of bondage. Know, therefore, that the Lord he is God, the faithful God who keeps covenant and steadfast love with those who love him and keep his commandments to a 1,000 generations. It is in the historical indicative of this gracious, faithful love that the imperative of the law of God for his people's life is rooted. And it is an imperative. Take heed lest you forget the Lord, direly warns Deuteronomy, and admonishes hell the God who is loved and saved will brook no apostasy of his people, no unfaithfulness to their covenant, But it is in grateful response to this prior love so concretely manifest in their history that they are to love the Lord their God, with all their heart and soul and might, to cherish his words in their heart and teach them diligently to their children, to talk of them at home and away, night and day, to let his words govern the work of their hands, the seeing of their eyes and all they're going out and coming in. They are to live in constant remembrance of and response to God's love and law, to mark the relevance of his word to every moment of their existence. Hence when the child asks his father, the meaning of Passover and its symbols, he is probing not only the Lord of long ago, and when as in Deuteronomy, your son asks you in time to come, what is the meaning of the testimonies and the statutes and the ordinances, which the Lord our God has commanded you? He is opening the way for more than interpretation of the commands. Beyond their own realization of the implications of their questions, these sons are inquiring after the source and meaning of the historical community in which they have come to selfhood and thus after the meaning of their lives, the nature and ground of their duty and their good, the motivation of the faithful obedience to which they're called. The sons are asking in effect, who am I? Who are we? What are we meant to be and do? And whence such meaning of our existence? Their answers grow out of their story. We have been saying they, as we recall their story and its meaning for them. But who are we? What is a meaning of our existence as a corporate body, the church, and as individual members thereof? What is the source of our historic and present community, the directive for our life and work, the motivation for our response? What are we meant to be and do both now and in the years ahead? These questions are not new to any of us. So we may rarely put them in this explicit form. There are fundamental questions, which we are always engaged in answering, if not in word and idea, then in life, in attitude, decision, action. And what we acknowledge as our faith, we too communicate. Let us consider now not these questions themselves, but some ways in which we receive and communicate regarding them. One way of dealing with them is to view ourselves against the Deuteronomic view of the covenant, the covenant people of God, to remember that we are they. Their story is our story. We belong to their continuing historical covenant community called into being and constituted by the gracious initiative of God and nourished, guided, rebuked and renewed by him down the ages until this day. For the old story is a continued story of a continuing community. And it has a way of being brought up to date over and over. Prophet and Psalmist and teacher and priest in ancient times, harked back repeatedly to the beginning of their story of God's dealing with his people and then brought the story up to date with fresh news of its current meaning, its claim upon them. And the New Testament reviews and reconceives the whole matter of the faithful witnessing community and its story to tell to the nations. You know its Christ's good news of the action of God in Jesus Christ, the revelation of his wisdom, his power and his reconciling love. The reconstituting of a new Israel, a new or renewed community of which we are members. And we can add the continuing revealing events through his spirit in the church down the centuries and still say the ancient story is the beginning of our story too. There is one body and one spirit just as you recall to the one hope that belongs to your call. One Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and father of us all, who is above all and through all and in all. One of the striking aspects of the new Christian teachings emerging in our generation, the new yet old ones, may be found in the

recovery of this biblical theological perspective on our existence. From a protogorean, man is the measure of all things. We are turning to Jeremiah's acknowledgement of an eternal measure of man. I know, oh Lord, that the way of man is not in himself. It is not in man that walketh to direct his own steps. Yet this is not, as might appear, a regression to Biblicism, to truth all laid out in words to be taken literally, but from between black Morocco covers. For what we want and have discovered to us and communicate with others, in anguishing over the fundamental questions of our existence, is not simply ideas or propositions, but ultimate reality. God confronting us through the ancient story and through and in the nurturing community, the living active God encountering us through the events, speaking to our condition now. God represented in the symbols of Passover, nay more in the symbols of Christ and his church. So we are not antiquarians. We need the answer to our existence in the present action of God in his community. This leads us to a second point regarding our learning and communicating the faith. It is primarily through the community, through relationships with persons, through participation in their activity that God becomes known to us. It is in such relationships that we come to selfhood in a community, carrying a culture, a tradition, a faith born of historic experience in a community of family and church, now illuminating life's meaning, now celebrating it in worship. A little Danish boy came into our apartment community a few years ago, an engaging child who could not speak English. One of the neighbors suggested sitting him down and instructing him in our language and then playing with him. But a younger one less sophisticated, less of an intellectual, simply went out to him in comradeship and involved him in play and let the English words fall as they might and it worked. The Passover story is more than words. It is drama. It is action. It is community. The meaning to the questioner and to the others lies deeper than words in trust, in claim, in commitment, in obedience, in the communicated or shared reverence, anticipation, joy, gratitude and loyalty on the part of elders in the total response of life. The relation between the dramatized service and the daily outlook and practice, all this catches the individual up into the past and present response of his community to God. So in the family and in the church at worship celebrating the festivals that mark the great days of the Christian here and carry its message. so with the family and the church, joining in service to others in advocacy of causes, in devotion to what is right, we find illumination, involvement, relationships through which God speaks, communicates with us. Amos Wilder has warned us against conceiving Christianity as chiefly verbal and confessional proclamation. This, he says, risks separating God's dealing with our ears from his dealing with the rest of our lives. What God did in Christ, he says, was more than to announce a message. It was to bring a new kind of community to birth, to affect a new social creation. To be a Christian, he goes on, to be a Christian is something that goes deeper than our ideas and confessions and deeper than our code of behavior. It means our incorporation in a stream of history and in the redemptive events, which determine that stream. It means belonging to a community whose members participate in a shared drama of the past in a revelatory history. This is evidently more than a matter of hearing the cult story preached, he continues. It's a matter of sharing in the cult right and in the total life of the cult community. To share in his life is to appropriate the revelation in just as real a sense as to hear it proclaimed. Christians have said that this way in which God is mediated to the members of the community through the historical community, both church and family, means for us, the spirit of God at work. This is part of what we talk about when we mention the Holy Spirit. We, all of us in this chapel, could have much in our own lives illuminated, if with the eyes of faith, we could see how God has worked in our own past, in our family and in our church. If we could see how in our earliest years the love, the acceptance, the forgiveness of a mother and a father, the toleration of brothers and sisters, forgiveness there too. The sense of belonging as we move outside the family, and yet

have it as a sort of home base from which to meet the challenge of a three-year-old's or a five-year-old's excursion into society. The years between when, as parts of our gangs and fellowships and early loves, we feel accepted, belonging, secure, able to meet life's crises. Could we see the spirit of God at work in these and all other instances of the upbuilding of community of love? And could we anticipate the times when we too can be in families, the channels of such acceptance and forgiveness and love? Yet when we've said all that the stark fact is that the community, both the church and the family, the community is a weak and selfish and erring and sinful one too. And that you and I, as we come to worship today, bring bondages and hurts, which alongside the edifications and the securities and the forgiveness have been built into our lives. Built there because fathers and mothers, like us, were not fully in the love and grace of God and could not give fully that empowering security and forgiveness and encouragement needed for the fullness of life. And so we met life with some hurts and distortions, some evasions, some fears and deep anxieties. And we, in our own time, go on to perpetuate these, perpetuate them in others to whom we communicate, not only our faith, but our unfaith, our rebellion, our failure, our sin. Yet the word continues to come to us through our story and through our community of what God really wants us to be. And how, in spite of all the mess we've made, the failures we have endured and perpetuated, God remakes and restores and reconciles. One word more on communicating our faith. In the Passover story, which we attended to, and in the historic Christian Church, there have been special ministries of leadership, some gifts of grace, to be sure, to apostles and prophets and pastors and teachers, but there have been common gifts of grace, which are all the more needed for every member of the community is a mediator of the spirit. And one can't help thinking as he contemplates the tremendous potential of (indistinct) of what the church might come to, of what Christian families might come to, if young people trained here in the religious insights that could illuminate their lives and their life together, could go on into the churches and into their families to be true mediators of the word and grace of Jesus Christ. Let us pray. Now unto him, who is able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that worketh in us, unto him, be glory in the church by Christ Jesus throughout all ages, a world without end. Amen.