

1 Kings 2:10-12; 3:3-14  
Ephesians 5:15-20

12<sup>th</sup> Sunday after Pentecost  
Midway Presbyterian Church  
August 15, 2021

## **You've Got to Fill a Man with Something**

### *Introduction to the Old Testament Lesson*

Our Old Testament Lesson for this Sunday connects the story of King David to that of his son and successor, Solomon. Then we hear Solomon's prayer for wisdom. Listen to these words from 1 Kings 2:10-12, 3:3-14...

### *Introduction to the Epistle Lesson*

One of the characteristics of the Christian's life is wisdom. Our Epistle Lesson reminds us that the Christian life is an alternative to that of the dominant culture. Listen to these words from Ephesians 5:15-20...

### *Sermon*

Our Epistle Lesson from Ephesians 5 cautions us to

Be careful then how you live,  
not as unwise people, but as wise. (v. 15)

As Paul had earlier stated in the eighth verse of this same chapter 5,

For you were once darkness, but now you are light in the Lord.  
Live as children of light.

The Apostle Paul's own life, following that conversion experience on the Road to Damascus, is a beautiful illustration of what "look carefully then how you live" can mean in practice. As we read the story of his missionary journey to Rome (Acts 27), with its account of tempest and shipwreck and of his assumption of virtual captaincy of a pagan crew of sailors, we get a picture of a Christian apostle as anything but a pale, impractical "saint," withdrawn from the rough-and-tumble of life.

What we find in this letter of Ephesians are three contrasts, harkening back to the dramatic distinction between darkness and light: do not be unwise, but wise; do not be foolish, but discerning; do not be drunk with wine, but filled with the Spirit. First,

Be careful then how you live, not as unwise people but as wise, making the most of the time, because the days are evil. (vv. 15-16)

In our Old Testament lesson from 1 Kings, Solomon, on his ascension to the throne of David, prays that God will give him wisdom. Sadly though, that request stands in stark contrast to the principles by which Solomon actually ruled—a glaring example of the frequent distance between God’s hope for human life and the manner in which we actually live.

Here in Ephesians there is reference, first to the wisdom literature of Proverbs, and then beyond. Proverbs 23:23 declares, “Buy truth, and do not sell it; buy wisdom, instruction, and understanding.” Our own American “wisdom” tradition contains proverbs urging prudence: “A penny saved is a penny earned.” “Better safe than sorry.” “A stitch in time saves nine.” But Ephesians moves on beyond prudence to a compelling image of liberation. “Make the most of time...”—the Greek means “buy back” or “redeem” the opportunity. Here is the image of the slave redeemed from servitude, or the family heirloom bought back from the pawnbroker.

“Life is short—make the most of it.” Reminds me of that line, “I always knew I’d get old. How fast it happened was a bit of a surprise.”

And the song that Roy Clark sang at the funeral service for baseball great, Mickey Mantle:

Yesterday when I was young  
 So many happy songs were waiting to be sung...  
 So many wild pleasures lay in store for me  
 And so much pain my dazzled eyes refused to see...  
 I ran so fast that time and youth at last ran out  
 I never stopped to think what life was all about...  
 And every conversation I can now recall  
 Concerned itself with me, and nothing else at all...

There's an old Chinese adage which says, "Opportunity has a forelock so you can seize it when you meet it. But once it is past, you cannot seize it again." Or as we say, "Opportunity only knocks once."

Make the most of the time. Are we making the most of our time at Midway Presbyterian Church? Are there ways we could be more involved in the life of the church. Like serving on a committee, singing in the choir, or going to Sunday School? The message of Ephesians is that the grace of God offers us the chance to buy back the time we may have sold out to lesser gods. For the true and living God that we know in Jesus Christ, enables us not to escape from life, but to choose wisely from the full opportunities of life.

Be careful then how you live, not as unwise people but as wise,  
making the most of the time, because the days are evil.

For the Ephesians, the "evil days" represented the persecution and distress that threatened the church throughout the Roman Empire. The present opportunity for Christian life and ministry might not last much longer. For Christians in Nazi Germany in the lead-up to World War II, the "evil days" meant pressure from the authorities "to go along, to get along." And sadly, many did just that. For Jews it often meant a sentence to the concentration camps of Auschwitz, Flossenbug, or Treblinka.

And of course, we too know "evil days." What with the Taliban taking over Afghanistan, killing those who have opposed them. What with Iran developing nuclear weapons and provoking turmoil in the Middle East. What with drugs claiming the lives of millions of Americans. What with hackers demanding and receiving ransom. With our national debt now at over \$28 trillion and growing every day. A debt that will one day weigh heavily on the backs of our children and grandchildren. We could go on. Wake up! Look carefully how you live. Be wise, make the most of time. The days are evil.

So the first contrast of the distinction between darkness and light is: do not be unwise, but wise. The second is:

Do not be foolish, but understand what the will of the Lord is. (v. 17)

The opportunities that come our way are opportunities for doing the will of God. And in order to do his will, we must pay attention to his Word, and apply it to our lives today through the wisdom that the Holy Spirit bestows. For wisdom corrects foolishness. So that we seek to have the same mind in ourselves which was also in Christ Jesus. (Phil. 2:5) Choose the Christian life as an alternative to the dominant culture.

The third contrast that harkens back to the distinction between darkness and light is:

Do not get drunk with wine, for that is debauchery; but be filled with the Spirit. (v. 18)

This wisdom echoes Proverbs 23:21 which states:

...for the drunkard and the glutton will come to poverty, and drowsiness will clothe them with rags.

Debauchery is the word used to describe the Prodigal Son's downfall, wherein he wasted himself in riotous ways in the far country.

And yet, who does not yearn to be lifted above the ordinary by an inner joy? Anti-drug campaigns urge us to, "Just say no." Ephesians goes beyond that warning to offer an honest-to-goodness joy through the indwelling Spirit of God. Edinburgh theologian A. C. Welch was once preaching on the text, "Be filled with the Spirit." And he began with this sentence: "You've got to fill a man with something." The heathen sought happiness in filling himself with wine and with all worldly pleasures; the Christian finds his happiness in the fullness which the Spirit gives.

So the word is, “Just say yes”—to God, realizing that Christian devotion calls for a clear mind and clean heart. But note that the spiritual elevation offered here is more than an individual high; it is a communal joy shared by all the people.

The sober admonitions of verses 15-19 conclude with the image of Christians singing,

...but be filled with the Spirit, as you sing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs among yourselves, singing and making melody to the Lord in your hearts... (5:18b-19)

“Making melody to the Lord with all your heart.” The effects of too much alcohol are obvious, but what happens when we are under the influence of the Spirit? Singing and giving thanks.

Martin Luther said he would be happy for someone else to write the church’s theology, if he could write the church’s hymns. It’s almost like saying, “I’d rather hear the choir sing than the minister preach.” And perhaps some of you may feel that way! By the way, Martin Luther did write hymns, including “A Mighty Fortress Is Our God.” In Acts 16, it was in the middle of the prayer and song of Paul and Silas that the earthquake came, and all the prison doors flew open.

In John 15:11 we hear the words of Jesus:

I have said these things to you so that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be complete.

And in 1 Corinthians we read,

So, whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do everything for the glory of God.

Singing glorifies God and edifies us. William Barclay says that the early church was a singing church. They knew a happiness which led them to sing.

I must confess that when in high school, and a member of Central Presbyterian Church in Jackson, Mississippi, on Sunday evenings I occasionally went over to Calvary Baptist Church. The sanctuary was nearly full, the preaching was compelling, but the main joy was the singing.

The choir and the congregation filled that holy space with joy. We may not have as many people in a worship service here at Midway, but we can make a joyful noise unto the Lord!

And finally, our lesson declares,

[give] thanks to God the Father at all times for everything in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ. (5:20)

The early church was a thankful church. They sought to develop the spiritual practice of gratitude—the grace of a grateful heart. This is wise. And to do so will bring blessings to each of us and our church.

In our lesson from Ephesians 5, Paul proclaims a prophetic word, while calling for churches to be “filled with the Spirit.” Christians like you and me, in following the path that Jesus walked; not being conformed to the patterns of the world, but being transformed by the renewing of our minds; making the most of the time; growing, maturing, finding joy, singing, and giving thanks—are indeed, being wise, and giving glory to our Creator and Redeemer.

In the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Amen.