

Preacher: Pastor Twyla

Scripture: Ephesians 5:15-20

¹⁵ Be very careful, then, how you live—not as unwise but as wise, ¹⁶ making the most of every opportunity, because the days are evil. ¹⁷ Therefore do not be foolish but understand what the Lord’s will is. ¹⁸ Do not get drunk on wine, which leads to debauchery. Instead, be filled with the Spirit, ¹⁹ speaking to one another with psalms, hymns, and songs from the Spirit. Sing and make music from your heart to the Lord, ²⁰ always giving thanks to God the Father for everything, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.

MESSAGE

A certain pastor typically preached up to two hours. One Sunday he was going strong for some time when one of his regular members got up and left. A while later the same man returned. Later the pastor asked him where he had gone during the sermon. The member said he’d gone to get a haircut. The pastor asked why he hadn’t gotten one before he came to church. The member replied, “Before I came, I didn’t need one.”

Time, be careful with the time you have in life. That’s what Paul told the Ephesians. He said, “Make the most of every opportunity, or another way of saying this is “make the most of your time” Today’s culture might say that to do this we must grab the gusto, cram our time full, stay busy, get the most out of your life! But making the most of your time might mean, (and indeed it does) being still, devoting time to prayer and worship, spending time with God, doing something for someone else, etc.

If we take a look at the original Greek text for the meaning of, “Making the most of,” we find that it quite literally means to “buy back” or to “redeem” time. Well, we all know it’s impossible to buy back time. So, what then does Paul mean? He is telling us that we should “buy the time, reclaim the time we have, precious as it is, away from whatever has a grip on it.”

While we cannot go back in time to do things over, Paul invites us to consider what has a grip on our time now. He warns us that the days we live in are evil; and if we are not careful, our time will be strangled by the evil in this world. Feelings like fear and anxiety over our future, over the problems of the world; or habits like excessive time spent watching frivolous or violent television programs, surfing the internet and social media or gossiping about other people, and avoiding those who are different from us are just some things that we might fixate on and miss using the time to being open to opportunities to be blessed by God. Paul’s intent here is to encourage careful use of our time or be subject to the corruption that afflicts much of our world.

Wisdom helps us make good choices for the use of our time. As Christians, we don’t want to find ourselves consumed by the swamps of evil in our world, so we need God’s wisdom to help. Paul said, “live not as the unwise, but as the wise.” The wisdom we seek is not intellectual knowledge; but instead, it is an alignment of ourselves with the values approved by God. Living in keeping with God’s commandments, pursuing those traits which make for peaceful and harmonious life, attending to God’s insights – these are among the characteristics of wisdom that we should seek for the use of our time.

In verse seventeen, Paul goes on to say, “Therefore, do not be foolish, but understand what the Lord’s will is.” In the first-century philosophical tradition, and really, much like it is in the secular world today, the opposite of foolishness would be self-possession, discipline, independence of the spirit and the will. In other words, this means relying on ourselves, our own

beliefs of right and wrong, and freedom to do what makes us feel good. Foolishness is a waste, and even dangerous use of our gift of time.

The Huntington River Gorge, near Richmond, Vermont, is beautiful but deadly. In the last forty or more years, twenty people (mostly young adults in their twenties and thirties) have lost their lives in the gorge. Hundreds of gorge swimmers have been injured.

On the surface the water of the gorge looks calm and placid, but beneath it are strong currents that run swiftly over treacherous waterfalls and whirlpools. Public safety officials have designated the gorge “the single most deadly place in the state.” Warning signs have been posted on a side of the gorge, reading, “When the water is high due to rain or snowmelt, especially powerful currents can easily sweep you over the falls and trap you underneath the water.”

People are debating about what to do about the gorge. Some argue for more public information about the gorge’s risks. Others want to ban anyone from visiting the place. Meanwhile swimmers continue to be attracted to the scene. One college student attending the University of Vermont – just fourteen miles from the gorge – said she had heard about the beauty of Huntington River Gorge and wanted to see it. She said people already know about the dangers and try their best to be careful.

“You can’t change the water, and you can’t stop people from going in,” she said.

This story illustrates the folly of foolishness. Our spirits can experience unnecessary wounds, souls drown in the abyss of depression and darkness when foolishness wins. Our foolishness not only hurts us, but it can also impose the same kinds of damage on the lives of others too.

For the Christian, however, the wisdom that stands opposite foolishness is not one’s own wisdom, but that which stems from understanding God’s will. We need God’s wisdom to avoid foolishness.

Then in verse eighteen, Paul says, “Do not get drunk on wine, which leads to wickedness. Instead, be filled with the Spirit.” Notice, he does not say, “Don’t do this, but do this other thing.” He is merely pointing out a human recklessness as opposed to divine wisdom. Some people turn to excessive amounts of alcohol when they seek joy, when they want good company with others, when they need recovery from a bad day, or when they want to celebrate a good day. Paul’s point is that turning to **anything in excess** that produces a temporary high is artificial. Yet the world says, that’s all we got. Valuable time and life experiences get lost in temporary artificial ecstasies. However, Paul points us to the one thing that we can never get enough of, the Spirit of Jesus.

At age forty-seven, Julio Franco became the oldest player in major league baseball history to hit a home run. A week later, on April 27, 2006, he became the oldest player in ninety-seven years to steal a base.

With a cloud of skepticism surrounding the sport, Franco’s longevity has met suspicion from players and outsiders who doubt that he has stayed in top shape through natural training alone. In 2004, retired outfielder Andy Van Slyke accused Franco of using steroids. Franco’s response demonstrated the true source of his remarkable life: “Tell Andy Van Slyke he’s right – I’m on the best juice there is. I’m juiced up every day, and the name of my juice is Jesus. I’m on his power, his wisdom, his understanding. Andy Van Slyke is right, but the thing he didn’t mention was what kind of steroids I’m on. Next time you talk to him, tell him the steroid I’m on is Jesus of Nazareth.”

Christians, with the wisdom of God, know that only the Spirit produces real ecstasy, real happiness. People can overindulge in all kinds of things when they feel like something is missing

in their lives and when they feel they need a pick-me-up, only to discover in the end, emptiness. But we can never, ever get too much of the Spirit!

Finally, Paul urges us to sing to one another and to always give thanks to God. This instruction “seems out of place in the otherwise stern language of the reading, but it may be that such singing is understood as, after all, part of living in accordance with God’s wisdom. But then, when we are filled with the wisdom of the Spirit, we discover that thanksgiving is a powerful antidote to the world’s foolishness. Is it possible for any human being to be grateful “at all times and for everything”?

Frederick Buechner believes we can. He wrote, “One winter I sat in army fatigues somewhere near Anniston, Alabama, eating my supper out of a mess kit. The infantry training battalion that I had been assigned to was on bivouac. There was a cold drizzle of rain, and everything was mud. The sun was going down.

I was still hungry when I finished and noticed that a man nearby had left something that he was not going to eat. It was a turnip. When I asked him if I could have it, he tossed it over to me. I missed the catch, and the turnip fell to the ground, but I wanted it so badly that I picked it up and started eating it, mud and all.

Time deepened and slowed down. With a lurch of my heart, I saw suddenly that not only was the turnip good, but the mud was good too, even the drizzle and the cold were good, even the Army that I had dreaded for months was good.

Sitting there in the Alabama winter with my mouth full of cold turnip and mud, I could see at least for a moment how if you ever took truly to heart the ultimate goodness and joy of things even at their bleakest, the need to praise someone or something for it would be so great that you might even have to go out and speak of it to the birds of the air.”

Yes, my friends, even in the darkest of times in our lives, the Spirit’s wisdom helps us find the goodness of God, so we can lift our hearts and voices in thanksgiving and share the goodness of God with others.

Time is a gift from God. We should buy back time when we are finding ourselves lost in the foolishness and artificial temporary deceptive pleasures of evil. Wisdom of the Spirit of God helps us do that. Seek God’s wisdom and celebrate with thanksgiving your gift of time. Amen.