

Making the Most of Your Time

August 16, 2009

Ephesians 5:15 – 20 (RSV)

Our Tuesdays Together group has just finished up their month long series on the bible and homosexuality. During our last meeting at J.R.s home this past Tuesday, we looked at scriptures won which to base the welcome, acceptance and rights of LGBTQ people. In reading John 8 we saw that Jesus dissociates a human condition from a sinful cause when he declares a man was not born blind because of his sin or that of his parents, but so that the glory of God may be made manifest. His disciples asked whose sin had caused this man to suffer blindness, *“Rabbi,” they asked, “who sinned, this man or his parents that he was born blind?” “Neither this man nor his parents sinned,” said Jesus, “but this happened in his life. As long as it is day, we must do the work of him who sent me. . .”*

As the Holy Spirit began to act on the hearts of those present, questions began to arise concerning the purpose of infliction, pain and suffering in the world. Simply stated, “Why do bad things happen to good people?” I have to tell you that the discussion that followed was Spirit led and inspiring; representative of the words we heard during last Sunday’s sermon concerning taking ownership of those things in our life over which we have no control. Recall last week we heard that we have all made mistakes in our lives and have found ourselves suffering because of some poor choice that we have made. Maybe we suffer physically, or emotionally or maybe even spiritually. Regardless of the grudges we carry today, we should do all that we can to let go. If we are able to correct a circumstance, then we should correct it. If

we are not able to, then we should take ownership of it, but what we should not do is continue to carry a burden of guilt or shame. Jesus is the bread that gives life and promises to give this life to *all* who are seeking.

Today's epistle reading again echoes this theme, reminding us that there is hope for those who choose to walk not as a reflection of the world in which we live, but rather as one who has been set apart for the glory of God. Listen now for the reading of God's Word for His people.

Look carefully then how you walk, not as unwise men but as wise, making the most of the time, because the days are evil. Therefore do not be foolish, but understand what the will of the Lord is. And do not get drunk with wine, for that is debauchery; but be filled with the Spirit, addressing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody to the Lord with all your heart, always and in everything giving thanks in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ to God the Father. {Eph 5:15-20 RSV}

This is the Word of God and It can be trusted. Thanks be to God.

Let us pray:

God of Our Heart, help us to see and to know things for what they are, both inside and outside of ourselves. Help us to allow our lives, our situations and our experiences to be as they are, even when I wish them to be different. Help us to experience the importance of acceptance: that our lives, our situations and our experiences, just as they are, hold many gifts for us. Help us to know that if our eyes and our hearts are open, then we can learn from what life and people teach us. Help us to remember that to be in the state of acceptance means that we can truly move through the world knowing through prayer and discernment what we

can and cannot change. Open our ears that we may hear and our minds that we may learn from Your word for us today. In Christ wonderful and Holy Name we pray. Amen!

Today's scripture reading is in the nature of a review. The apostle Paul is describing figuratively or symbolically what is meant by, "how to walk," that is, Paul is describing not how we should walk, but rather how we should live. Earlier in his letter to the church at Ephesus, Paul encourages the people to live as they have been taught to live in Christ – to put off the old nature and to put on the new. The simple process of putting off and putting on is what the apostle means by walking.

Consider the act of walking for a moment. A walk consists of two steps repeated over and over again, one leg forward and then the other. To draw an analogy between the physical nature of walking and what is meant by living a Christian life is a simple yet powerful connection. As Christians, we are continually putting off the old and putting on the new. Isn't that what Christian living is all about. Not being satisfied with the way things are, but continuously seeking to better ourselves according to God's will and purpose for our lives.

Paul begins this portion of his epistle with one grand statement, summarizing all that he had introduced to them before. "Look carefully then how you walk." Paul does not warn them here about finding themselves distracted by the world or in losing their way by not being careful of where they walk, but rather addresses a grander, more supreme idea. He tells warns them to be cautious of *how* they walk. Where we walk is a relatively easy problem, but how we are remaining continually aware of this process is much more important.

This morning as we loaded up the car and I drove from Gillsville to Toccoa this morning, I had no problem as to where to drive. Of course, I did need to decide ahead of time if it was more beneficial for me to take the highway, through Habersham County along Hwy 365 or to travel the back road along Hwy 51 to Hwy 106. Either way, I knew how to get to the church. I knew where we were going and I knew that there was very little danger that we would lose our way. Now the process of driving is much more than just knowing where you're headed. The principles of good driving continuously play a role in arriving safely, regardless of your destination. Apply this logic to a man walking a tightrope. He has no concern as the *where* he is going or *where* he is expected to walk; the rope has already been set out before him. However, as to *how* he is to walk along that rope is much more important. If he is to arrive safely, then he must learn to walk *carefully*. This is what Paul was trying to convey to the people at Ephesus. They were to simply, "look carefully [at] how they walked."

As we continue to look at the words that follow opening remarks, we see that Paul offers us two characteristics that will help to ensure that we walk carefully. We are to walk with *understanding* and *awareness* – with *understanding* and *awareness*. At first, these two terms may seem to be the same, that is, they appear to be synonymous. As we continue develop our look at verses 15 – 20, we will see that not only are these two words distinct, but they serve a purpose of balance; one for each other.

First, we must walk with understanding; understanding that leads to a better definition of the character in life. Paul comes to grips here with a problem that is personal and present with all of us. He is dealing with the matter of the time in which we live in as much as he was dealing with the times in which he and the people of Ephesus lived. "Understand this, be wise;

don't be foolish but act as a wise man." How? By making the most of their time and thus, our time, because the days are evil!

I believe that it would be safe to say that many of us here view evil days as obstacles, as defeating circumstances, as pressures which tend to make us unable to be full in the will of God; to be Christians. Paul, however, sets forth for us a principle that very few Christians seem to grasp. What Paul is saying here, essentially, is that evil days create opportunities. All that we endure and all that we encounter provide for us a means to an end. Through our understanding of this principle, we learn that we must make the most of those opportunities which are created by what Paul refers to as evil days. The Word of God says you can be what God wants you to be, regardless of what anyone else is around you and we are promised the saving power and redeeming grace offered to us by the shed blood of our Redeemer Jesus Christ regardless of who we are and how the world has defined us.

Recall if you will the 2007 movie, "Evan Almighty." The plot summary found on imdb.com reads as follows, "Buffalo newsman Evan Baxter is elected to Congress with the slogan, "Change the world." He lucks into a huge house in a new Virginia suburb. His Capitol office is also fantastic, but there's a catch: he's tapped by the powerful Congressman Long to co-sponsor a bill to allow development in national parks. In steps God, who appears to a disbelieving Evan and gently commands him to build an ark. Tools and wood arrive in Evan's yard, animal pairs follow, his beard and hair grow wildly, nomad's clothes and a staff appear. Long grows impatient, Evan starts building, his family leaves him, reporters gather, and drought grips D.C. Still, Evan believes."

I bring all of this to your attention to tell you this; Evan Baxter clearly lived in world that resembled the one Paul saw in Ephesus. Sometimes we are so involved in our own suffering and distractions that we fail to see them for what they are; opportunities to make the most of a situation that is seemingly against us. If we never found ourselves under pressure, how could we manifest the overcoming grace of God? If we did not go through trials, how could we ever show that He is sufficient for every trial?

There is a scene in the movie where a conversation takes place between God and Evan's wife. The conversation occurs after she has left Evan and is unaware of who has engaged her in conversation. Amongst her complaining and disillusion, God speaks to her with these words, "Let me ask you something. If someone prays for patience, you think God gives them patience? Or does he give them the opportunity to be patient? If he prayed for courage, does God give him courage, or does he give him opportunities to be courageous? If someone prayed for the family to be closer, do you think God zaps them with warm fuzzy feelings, or does he give them opportunities to love each other?"

Let me ask you something. If you are diagnosed with a chronic illness, do you think that God is allowing you to the experience without an opportunity? You may pray for healing, but what about the opportunity to minister to those who share in your experience. If you are gay, do you think that if you pray to become straight that God will make you straight; or is there is an opportunity to make more of the experience? For me, it has offered an opportunity to reach out and minister to a group of individuals that has been set aside, rejected or forgotten.

It is the evil days that give us opportunity to demonstrate Christian life. Regardless of your circumstance, do not look at these days as some strange, unusual circumstance that you

alone are called to go through while everyone else has it easy and has a delightful time. Do not regard yourself as being called to be a martyr and that you must go through difficult and unusual circumstance and live miserably or forgotten. We could never demonstrate what it is to be a Christian if it were not for evil days. Paul wants us to understand this so that we will not be foolish, that we will not strike back and complain and grouse and gripe because of problems.

Now the second word Paul gives us can be described as *awareness*. We are to live life, not only with understanding, but with *awareness*. That is, we are to be aware of what God wants out of every situation. Almost always, when one uses the phrase, “the will of God,” most people, including Christians, understand it in terms of guidance. They think in terms of what we ought to do next, where we ought to live, what job we ought to have, whom we should love, whom we should marry or how we should decide some problem placed before us. Guidance is not the major problem, or the major factor. God is not half so much interested in what we do as what we are. Therefore, God’s will does not concern itself primarily about what we do. Once we begin to see our problems not as problems, but rather as opportunities, what we do is relatively unimportant. What we are, that is the big thing. What we are encompasses every facet of every situation.

Think for a moment about your life; not just your life in church, but your life at home, in business, at work, in your relationship with family and friends. We are to strive to be aware of what God want out of those situations, not what is to come, but what has already come to pass; to foster an awareness of our present life and all it involves. Don’t dwell on the past; the “I should haves” or the “what might have beens” that are no more to be regained than is youth by the elderly. Don’t dwell on what may be; on what life may have in store for you. Looking

too far into the future will only dull our appreciation for what today holds for us all; a renewed and reconciled relationship with our God and our Creator.

So how do we sum this up? Paul writes earlier in verse 10 that we are to “try to learn what is pleasing to the Lord.” What is it that pleases the Lord? Only one thing pleases our Lord and that Faith! Faith is believing God, believing what He says about life, believing what He says about people, about yourself, about the needs of people and of your own needs. Faith is *understanding* what is going on around us and becoming *aware* of how we are to respond in accordance to what the scriptures teach us. This is what the apostle Paul referring to; not trying to get guidance as to where we go next or what we should do or what our job should be, but remembering that in every situation we are to act on the basis of what the Word of God say about it. Acting on faith means to reject the success image that the world is constantly holding before us, the image of the man or woman that the world believes that we should be.

The world may view your situation as a lost cause or a hopeless case, but that doesn't mean that we have to view it that way. The world may view your health status as a death sentence, but the world does not have the final word. Cancer, blood disorders, HIV, pneumonia, a weakened immune system, diabetes or heart disease do not have the final say so in our lives; the bread of life, our Christ, our God, the one who is and is to come, the alpha and omega, the beginning and the end. He is the one who has the final say. The author of life is the only one who gets to decide how our story ends. God's evaluation is quite different than that of the world. God evaluates life and wants us to measure life by its true values; to be gracious, full of love in the midst of demanding circumstance, to manifest the grace of God towards

others and to share the love of Christ; His compassion, sweetness and self control through a Spirit filled life full of understanding and awareness.

As we close this morning I encourage you to be encouraged in your walk with God, not discouraged by the world. If you are trying to live your life as a Christian by going along with the general character of those around you, you are not living by faith. Even though you may be trying your hardest to work things out with the best of intentions, and you are feel that you are giving it all you have got in trying to analyze every situation and plan ahead and work to the best advantage, you are not pleasing God. Your life is missing the mark. Please God by looking beyond the immediate to the eternal; look beyond the visible to the invisible and walk in the light of that which is real. That is what Paul is trying to tell us when he says, "Look carefully then how you walk." Walk intelligently, understandingly and with awareness. Be aware that as Christians we have an immense advantage over every other person who is not a Christian because we know the truth; the truth as it is in Christ Jesus. We are to walk in this way.

If you are not a Christian today, then I'd like to offer you that truth today. I'd like to offer you the opportunity to share in the truth that is Jesus; the basic, fundamental reality of life. A walk consists of two steps repeated over and over again, one leg forward and then the other. Won't you take the advantage of the most important opportunity that you have ever been given and meet Him here today? The altar is open this morning and He is faithful to meet with you just as you are. Won't you come? Amen.