

Ephesians 5:15-20 "Wisdom, Temperance, Gratitude"

As you know, a desert is a barren area of land receiving very little rainfall. In general, an area with an average annual precipitation of less than 10 inches is defined as a desert. That is why the desert is very poor or hostile for plants and animals to live in. Deserts may seem lifeless, but in fact, many species survive in the harsh environments.

Among them, I would like to tell you about two kinds of birds that live in the desert. The hummingbird and the vulture. Vultures scope the lands for dead meat, that which eventually becomes their meal. But the hummingbirds do not even glance at the smelly dead meat. Instead, they fly to the various types of desert flowers and take the honey from those plants. A vulture consumes what was there, now dead without life, a thing of the past. A hummingbird consumes what is there, fresh from the present, full of life. Each bird arrives at what they're looking for. Even though they are in the harsh environment of the desert. Our lives are not much different.

This is what Paul speaks of in our passage today. There are two kinds of lives in this desert like world. There are those who are drunk on worldly pleasures, those who chase after debauchery. And then there are those who practice temperance, search after spiritual abundance and wisdom. And in the end, all will find what each has sought after.

Paul asks the Ephesian church to think deeply on how to live a Christian life in the world. Because the Christian life cannot be defined solely within the church. It depends on the choices you make in your daily life. Today's passage gives three thoughts. Wisdom. Temperance. Gratitude. When we think upon and act upon these three offers, our lives will change in a way that is pleasing to God. Eventually, not just my life but our families, church, school, workplace and even our community will transform.

Verse 15 says, "Be very careful, then, how you live." The verbatim translation of the Greek phrase is "Walk with diligence." First be wise, Paul says, "live—not as unwise but as wise, making the most of every opportunity".

"To make most" in Greek is "exagorazo", and has the meaning "to lift up, to save." Note that this word is related to fishing. It refers to the image of a fisherman lifting up his fish from the waters with his net.

It's the season of crabbing here in Connecticut. Of course, this is before COVID-19, but I went crabbing a few times with church members at a previous church. It's not bad fun. When the tide went down, we caught crabs with a trap or tying chicken legs on a rope to catch them. If you stand still and look into the water, you will see crabs crawling. By the way, no matter how many crabs are in the water, it has nothing to do with us if we don't lift them up. Like this, many opportunities pass us by. To live a wise life is to excel at capturing these opportunities. But today's scripture is not simply about using time effectively or efficiently.

In John chapter 21, Jesus appeared to seven disciples including Peter after resurrection. They were fishing in the lake of Galilee, all night but with no fish to show for it. Then Jesus commanded them to throw the nets to the other side and once they obeyed, they caught 153 fish, almost enough to rip open the nets. Of course, the Gospel tells us the net did not rip, despite the multitude of fish. It means under normal circumstances the net would have ripped. But it wasn't the case when they obeyed the word of Jesus.

Only in the Gospel of John is the lake of Galilee referred to as the lake of Tiberius. Tiberius was the concurrent emperor of the time. We do this now too, don't we, putting important people's names on buildings, roads, locations. Politicians of the time used to call Galilee Lake the Lake of Tiberius to flatter the emperor. The emperor was the one man that could do whatever he wanted regardless of the law and regulations of society. We see such a case in the Bible too, if he wanted a vineyard, he could have the vineyard even if it meant

murdering the owner. In this sense the emperor could be symbolic of human desire.

So, they are on the Emperor's Lake, the Lake of Desire. Toil upon the lake of desire all night and still they came up empty handed. It could be a metaphor for the life that is drowning in the oceans of want. We too live in this world sweating in order to have something we want. It's natural. Everyone lives that way. But today's Bible verse asks what choices we make moment by moment.

During the time of Roman oppression, the Christians had a symbol to recognize each other. The fish symbol. We can still see them sometimes on the bumper or the trunk of car. Why did they use the fish symbol? Is it because of the Sea of Galilee? In fact, fish is called "ichthus" in Greek. Taking the initials of the Greek alphabet for this word, iesous christos theou yios soter, which means Jesus Christ God's Son Savior! It was a symbol of their confession of faith.

What about us? We too, in our own way in this world, toil all night long. We make many choices in life. But today's Bible challenges us to choose between whether we will continue to live our own way or walk with the Lord in the light of his word. As we sang today "Shine Jesus Shine", are we willing to ask God's presence and glorify Jesus' name in our life? Among the multitude of opportunities are we living a life that is interwoven with Christ? Do we trust and obey?

Secondly, we must be temperate people. We must be able to live with self-discipline to live a life of wisdom. If we cannot be self-disciplined, we are bound to lose the many opportunities that lie ahead. Verse 18, "Do not get drunk on wine, which leads to debauchery. Instead, be filled with the Spirit." Some say, so does that mean we can drink long as we're not drunk? Some say, pastor, how can we live in the 21st Century with such conservative values? Some say, well, one drink can't hurt.

But let us try to understand God's heart very carefully and wisely in this text. Today's scripture cautions against drunkenness because it will lead to debauchery. What is this word in Greek? "Asotia", with the meaning, "too much". Also, "asotia" is a compound word with "a-" as the negative auxiliary before "sozo", which means to save, to keep from harm. Debauchery cannot save us from loneliness, from suffering, from all the problems of life. It just makes people forget for a short period of time.

1 Corinthians chapter 10 reveals an enormous truth.

23 "'Everything is permissible'--but not everything is beneficial. 'Everything is permissible'--but not everything is constructive. Nobody should seek his own good, but the good of others..."

This verse is less about whether we must drink or not, than it is about our lives as Christians. Are we truly seeking after spiritual abundance, are we seeking after another's well-being, especially the well-being of their spirits? This is our God's heart. Each and every one of us must look inside and examine what is already there swallowing up our hearts instead of our God.

Verse 18 says, "Instead, be filled with the Holy Spirit".

We can either fill ourselves with worldly things, or the blessings of our God. If we are full with the world, it is hard to figure out God's Will. It becomes impossible to live in obedience to God's word. In this regard, temperance means, staying awake and sensitive to God, at all times.

If a person is drunk, or steeped in some other worldly goods, that person is living through the powers of the drink, or that other certain power. When live in temperance with spiritual abundance, we can live a life that pleases God. Both ways promise a transformation. One will lead to debauchery, the other to abundance. Are we going to fill ourselves with the world, with pride and self-love? Or are we going to be filled with the Holy Spirit? The scripture proclaims we cannot have both.

Thirdly God wants that we live in gratitude. Paul tells us to never lose thanks in whichever circumstance we find ourselves in. Verse 20 says, "always giving thanks to God the Father for everything, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ." The Apostle Paul exhorts us to never lose our gratitude, no matter what our circumstances. But our problem is that we keep forgetting to be grateful.

Once a man went to a rabbi and complained about his life, "My life is terrible. I am living in a room cramped with nine men. Rabbi, please tell how I am to change my life?"

And the rabbi answered, "Bring a goat into the room." The man was not sold on this solution but the Rabbi insisted, "Do what I tell you, and come back in a week." A week passed. The man came back even more unpleasant than he had been before. He said, "Rabbi, we cannot stand it any longer. This goat is too disgusting, and filthy."

And the Rabbi answered, "Then go home and let the goat out. And come back in a week." A week passed. The man came back again, this time jumping with joy. "Rabbi, life is so beautiful. We are enjoying every minute of it. There is no goat in the room. Now it is just the nine of us."

Gratitude has a lot to do with our perspectives on life. With a positive view of gratitude, everything is something to be thankful for. With a negative view of melancholy, even the biggest grace does not elicit thanks within us.

Philippians 4:11-13 says, "Not that I am referring to being in need; for I have learned to be content with whatever I have. I know what it is to have little, and I know what it is to have plenty. In any and all circumstances I have learned the secret of being well-fed and of going hungry, of having plenty and of being in need. I can do all things through him who strengthens me."

Dear sisters and brothers in Christ Jesus, a wise life, temperate life, a life filled with gratitude does not come just because we are sitting in a church. Think of fish every time you make a choice in your life. "Am I really trying to hold onto Jesus in this choice? Am I lifting up Jesus in all circumstances?" Please ask

yourself. In our closing hymn we will sing shortly, it is written: "When we walk with the Lord in the light of his word, what a glory he sheds on our way! While we do his good will, he abides with us still, and with all who will trust and obey." Fairfield Grace, May God's grace and peace be with you and your family, and your business, and your studies, and with the lives of your children. Amen.