

Sermon Theme: Live Wisely

Sermon Reading: Ephesians 5:15-20

“Ten steps to a healthier you” you see the magazine reads waiting in line at the grocery. “Five ways to feel more fulfilled” is one of suggested links to click when you go online. “The Secret to Success”; there’s almost an entire section of such books at a book-store. So many places we see these bold promises that if you do this one thing or here are your top five ways or maybe ten things you can do, your life will better in some shape or form. None of these things are probably going to tell you **have** to do this because one way to really get on people’s nerves is tell them they **have** to do something. From the defiant teenager to the stubborn, strong-willed elder, “You can’t tell me what to do!” is a feeling and thought shared by many. So instead, there’s the promise of a hopeful outcome to motivate you to make a change in your life.

A problem that quite a few have with the church and organized religion in general is that it tells you what you **have** to do. There’s all these rules that you have to follow; otherwise, someone—it might be church leadership, mom or dad, grandparents, or some are willing to admit it is God—will get upset. This is a problem that many have with the Wisconsin Lutheran Synod, our church: there’s just too many rules, they claim! I would be willing to argue that isn’t really true. I’d be willing to argue that there is really only one rule; albeit, it’s still difficult to live by. But for God’s people this one rule isn’t something that we have to do, it’s what we want to do because the promise that God gives to you isn’t a hopeful wish. It’s not a maybe. It’s a guarantee that is already yours by faith. And so, for God’s people, the one rule is we want to live wisely according to God’s will.

In the reading from Ephesians 5 Paul, writing to the group of Christians in the city of Ephesus, tells them and us, **Be very careful with how you live**, in v.15. The word “live” here has the picture of you walking around and that every step of the way in your life should be done with deliberate carefulness. Think of a tight rope walker and how they are careful with their steps; we want to live our lives similarly. Every step you take, everything you do is to be done with careful attention to detail. When we are careful with how we live, we are living “not as unwise but as wise” Paul says.

He continues in v.16, “**Make the most of every opportunity, because the days are evil.**” The only surprising thing in this verse, maybe, is that already in Paul’s day the days are evil (there’s really nothing new under the sun). Watching the news, hearing, or reading it and it doesn’t take too long before we are reminded of how the days are evil. All too often we hear that question, “How could someone do that?” after another heinous, senseless crime is committed. Recognizing this truth, it makes sense that you want to make the most every opportunity.

But, what does this mean; how do you do that? For some this means living in the moment; doing all you can right now to enjoy life today. No one can tell me what I can and cannot do! Instead of living to work, you work to live and enjoy life right now. Others see it as, you don't know how bad it can be in the future, so you better save as much as possible now—put in the time, energy, money into saving up for the bad time—just in case! Either way, it's making the most of the opportunity—at least according to our reason. My reason, your reason tells you to focus on right now—whatever makes you happy, feel good, feel comfortable what you think or what others might think—because that's what you deal with today. But your relationship with God, eternity, life after death, that all seems so far off in the future. Even when we know the end can come at any moment, it still does not seem as important or even as real when compared to what I face today. And so, all too easily, doing what is best for you right now gets in the way of doing what is best for your relationship with God right now. It's all too easy to dull our consciences into thinking that what I know or have right now with God is good enough; I have something to fall back onto if things get really bad but otherwise there's time later to get more serious about it.

Do not be foolish, Paul says. Instead, make the most every opportunity to understand what the Lord's will is. Don't be foolish or unwise; the best way to make the most of the opportunities is not based on how you feel, your emotions, how someone else feels or how they will react. It's not based on your personal or anyone else's opinion. How you live wisely is by understanding the will of God. As Jesus tells us in Matthew, seek first God's kingdom and righteousness (Matthew 6:33). Living wisely means putting reason in its proper place and that is under and behind God's will. Living wisely doesn't mean necessarily book smarts or street smarts or how much knowledge you have. It's understanding the will of God. And God's will and desire is that you come to be with him in heaven. His will is for all to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth. His will is that nothing gets in the way of you seeking to understand his will.

Think of how much God loves you that he did the seemingly unreasonable by sending his own Son so that you might be with him in heaven. He didn't have to, but he reveals his will to you in the Bible so that you have this knowledge, so that you aren't foolish but are able to live, walk carefully according to his will. His will is that we live each day a day of repentance turning away from that which gets in the way of our seeking to understand his will—including our reason—and in faith turn to him for full and free forgiveness that is already yours. God wants you to wake up and remember where you belong and who you are: a child of God bought and paid with the blood of his Son and washed clean of sin. The thing is, we will never fully understand or completely comprehend the will of God; there is always more room to grow and to better

understand. So we want to take every opportunity to understand God's will and to learn more and better of how to live wisely.

But in order to live wisely, in order to understand the will of God, we need to be filled up with the right thing. So, in verse 18, Paul warns us, **“Do not get drunk on wine, which leads to debauchery.”** The potential dangers of alcohol are all too real and too often hit close to home. Paul is not speaking against the use of alcoholic beverages, he is speaking against the abuse of it. He is speaking against all those things tied with the drunkenness: acting foolish, unwise, a lack of self-control, wasting words, not being very careful in how you live, not being prepared at all times to give an answer for the you have.

But it's not just alcohol that intoxicates and fills up. There are addictions in general—addiction to pornography, gambling, tobacco, social media, gossip, TV show watching, sports, and the list goes on and on—substances or something is controlling your life, filling you up, and not you controlling it. We fill up our schedules with being busy trying to do what's best, making the most of the time now to try and make everyone happy.

Think about your life: what are you filling yourself up with? Is it your hobbies—hunting, fishing, etc.? Work—always need to get something done? Trying to maintain a certain social status, trying to obtain a certain financial goal? Some of these in themselves are not sinful. But is it living wisely according to God's will? Or, is it keeping you from understanding and growing in the will of God? Is it keeping you from being filled up with the Word? Because when you, your schedule, your life is being filled up with something else more than God, it's pulling you away from him. It's like when you were younger and you weren't supposed to eat your dessert first because it was going to ruin the rest of your supper. When we fill up on enjoying and living the life to the fullest right now, when we listen to our reason and the ways of the world, it can ruin us from wanting to find time to fill up with God. Instead of being given the best and first, he only gets the left overs of time and energy and all too often there's not enough to go around so your relationship with God is the first to suffer.

Instead, Paul says, be filled with the Spirit. Here's the reason why we want to commit to memory those hymn verses, that's why it's good to continue memorizing those bible passages. It's so we are filled up with the Spirit, **by speaking to one another with psalms, hymns, and songs from the Spirit singing and making music from your heart to the Lord.** Be filled up with the Spirit by speaking to one another having conversations with the Word—that is, Bible study, grow in the Word, encourage one another with the Psalms of the Old Testament and the hymns you sing on Sunday.

We do this not because we have to, but because we want to! It's only in and with God's Word that his will is revealed and that you are filled with the Spirit and the Bread of Life. Jesus promises that those who eat his flesh and drink his blood, they remain in him and he in them. Hearing that sounds like we are a bunch of cannibals! Our reason might be a little taken aback at that thought. But this is what Jesus gives to you and you receive that guarantees that you will live forever. He doesn't offer one of many different options in a buffet line in order to have eternal life. He is the one and only way to be filled up and saved. By faith, we leave our reason in its proper place at the foot of the cross and we believe that for people who too often are filled up with other things, for people who too easily side with personal reason and opinions, for sinners like you and me, the Father sent Jesus, and because Jesus lives, those who feed on him will live forever. With his nail marked hands, whip-marked human flesh, and his human blood shed on the cross, Jesus removed your sin and the guilt of your sin forever so that God's mercy and goodness are yours forever.

It's for that reason we always will want to give thanks to God the Father for everything. There is never a time when a Christian has no occasion to give thanks to God the Father. Even when a loved one dies, we can be thankful. When lying in the hospital bed, there is an occasion to be thankful. But it's not because, "Things could be worse," or, "Be thankful for what you do have." Being thankful isn't being fake happy; it's not an emotion. It's an attitude that comes from a heart of faith. We are thankful because in the name of Jesus nothing can separate you from God's love. In the name of Jesus, sin and its addictions do not control you—you've been set free. In Jesus' name, you have God who is your Father whose will is being carried out for your good. In the name of Jesus, you are saved.

And so, we want to be thankful in all things and we want to live wisely. And you are off to a great start today because you are here being fed by God's Word. And for those who are prepared, Jesus invites you to come forward to receive his body and blood in another way for the forgiveness of sins in the Lord's Supper. With everything you decide to do, decisions you need to make, choices that you have, it's not about trying to figure out all the rules, checklists, or even what this church says. Ask yourself, "Is it wise according to God's will revealed in God's Word?" Live in peace that your sins are forgiven. Live wisely. Amen.