

## Pastor's Message – 8/22/2021

*In Love* worship series**Give Thanks** *in love*

## Ephesians 5:15-20

Thinking and reflecting on our Bible reading today, I started thinking about all the clichés about time that I could remember, like:

- Only time will tell
- In the nick of time
- Lost track of time
- Lasted an eternity
- Just a matter of time
- A waste of time
- Rushed for time
- In a jiffy
- The time of my life
- At the speed of light

One of my favorites is “never put off until tomorrow what you can do today.”

We've been working our way through our *in love* worship series from Paul's Letter to the Ephesians: “build up” *in love*, last week's “live” *in love*, today's theme of “give thanks” *in love*, and culminating next week with “move” *in love*.

In his Letter, Paul is writing to Christians in and around Ephesus, giving them advice on how to grow as a church that loves and cares for each other. He started with some general principles and has since moved to more specific instructions. Last week, he wrote about anger and the words that come out of our mouths. In the first Sunday of our 4-Sunday series, he wrote about using our gifts for good, for building up unity and fostering peace. Today, he continues to unpack what it looks like to live life as a wise person. Wise people make the most of time. Learn what the Lord wants you to do. Live sober lives filled with thankfulness to God.

His instructions seem, on the surface, like fairly ordinary advice. Yet there's more to this text than meets the eye. To really understand it, we need to peel back the English translation, revealing the Greek underneath.

"These are evil times," he writes, something which could probably be said of any civilization at any point in history. Without dismissing the harsh realities of our world, this seems a rather bleak view and ignores the fact that there are a lot of good things in our world: lots of blessings and things for which we can give thanks. Satellite journalism and the daily news gives us a heaping helping of negativity and sensationalism and sometimes I just get tired of hearing and seeing all of it.

Paul uses the expression, "Use every chance you have for doing good," (vs. 16) but that expression doesn't do justice to the Greek word Paul uses. One of the older translations is a little better: "redeem the time."

"Redeem" is a commercial word. In the Roman Empire, it was possible for slaves to work on their own time, over the course of many years, earning money to buy their freedom. The same word is used elsewhere in the New Testament, to talk about salvation in Christ. Jesus is our "redeemer:" the one who buys us out of slavery to sin.

For Paul, time needs to be redeemed. That's a stunning, original insight. To Paul, time itself is in a sort of bondage. Christians must "redeem" it, must buy time back from the world: for the world has trivialized time, enslaved it for low purposes.

"Making the most of" time, therefore, is more than a matter of saving time, or what's conventionally described as time management. It's not the quantity of time that's important, but its quality. That's where Paul differs from the time-management experts. For him, the question is not, "How much time can we save?" but "How can we redeem the time, how can we make it holy?"

We "redeem" time, using every chance we have for doing good, by giving thanks – "giving thanks" *in love.*" "Speak to each other with psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs," Paul says, "singing and making music in your hearts to the Lord." (vs. 19)

I don't know if you've seen them, but there has been a stream of commercials for Children's Hospital of Madison (WI) on the television lately. In the commercials, a child and often a parent comes in to see the doctor and, on their shoulders, there is perched a furry creature, a "worry." The "worry" worries, "Is it going to hurt?" "What if he knows I tasted the dog food?" "What if it's still on my

breath?" "What are you going to tell your Mom?" "You're going to be in so much trouble!" The "worries end up in the "Worry Receptacle."

In verse 15, Paul warns, "Be careful!" Not that the Lord wants us to be filled with worries and concerns. The admonition "Be careful!" acknowledges dangers and opportunities. First, the dangers. Since moral and spiritual pitfalls and mine fields abound, we need to negotiate our way with great care and precision. Second, we have opportunities to grasp. We must take care to make sure we don't flub the opportunities that God puts in our path.

Paul was speaking to Christians who lived in Ephesus, in the midst of a pagan culture. Because of that, their opportunities to tell others about the power of Jesus were limited, which is essentially what he meant by saying the days were "evil." The neighbors of the Christians in Ephesus weren't very open to hearing the gospel. That Christians live during "evil days" has already been established by the diatribe against pagan ways in verses 3-14. Rather than to become hopeless in the midst of evil, however, the imperative is for Christians to work harder and faster, reclaiming every possible moment through wise, faithful actions that bear witness and bear fruit.

Paul advised the Ephesian Christians to make good use of what few opportunities to share Christ arose, because there weren't a whole lot of them.

Our situation today is different. Some might argue that our culture is still pagan, but there's no shortage of opportunities in our age to tell the gospel. There are whole TV networks devoted to just that. Famous sports figures give their Christian testimonies. Church attendance may be down overall, but lots of people still go to church and hear the gospel week after week. Lots of people, by the miracle of livestreaming worship on YouTube or Facebook, are still hearing the good news of Jesus.

The kingdom of God has already come, but is not yet fully completed. It's easy to see a world that, though God may be gathering up (or has gathered up) all things in Christ, still hasn't fully realized that redemption. Must we forget all the brokenness in the world and simply give thanks to God for all that is? No. The call to give thanks is not a call to forget but, in fact, to remember. Part of

what it means to be children of the light is to be attentive to what can be, even in the darkness.

Have you ever really noticed a glove? If the glove does not have a hand inside, it is merely a shell. It can accomplish nothing. That's how it is when we try to live without the power of the Holy Spirit. We are as useless as a handless glove.

That reminds me of the story about the young boy who was out at dusk marveling at the fireflies flitting about the yard. Trying unsuccessfully to catch one and marveling at the blinking lights of the insects, he ran in to ask his Dad, "what causes fireflies to shine?" His Dad, unsure, suggested the boy ask his teacher. Not put off by his father's non-answer, the boy went back out and caught a firefly between his hands.

Excited, he ran back into the house, and showed his Dad the dying firefly which was still glowing. "I found the answer; it's the stuff inside!"

Paul writes, "be filled with the Holy Spirit." Paul is saying:

Carpe diem!

Claim the moment!

Go for the gold!

Reach for the brass ring!

Strike while the iron is hot!

Now is the time!

Seize the moment!

How we live makes a difference. Paul says to make the most of the time given to live in the will of the Lord. How we live makes a difference both for the time at hand and the time yet to come.

Most of the time, maybe all the time, our Prayers for the People occurs immediately after the offering, which is, in turn, followed by a doxology. Today, instead, our offering follows our Joys, Praise and Concerns. Our Song of Thanksgiving is not an act of forgetting the petitions we've just made, but rather a response to it. We respond to the needs of the world by bringing our gifts, which we ask God to bless and use in order to meet the needs of the world. And we give thanks to God that God is still working in the world to meet those needs and that God has called us to join in that work now and still to come.