

Wise Living

Sermon by Rev. Mandi Richey

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Ephesians 5:15-20
1 Kings 2:10-12; 3:3-14

So yesterday, I had a quite a day. First, yesterday morning I was reading a magazine and drinking my coffee. I set my magazine down to go and do something and without thinking, set my coffee down on top of the magazine. When I came back and picked up my magazine, I dumped the mug full of coffee all over myself and the floor.

Then, Matt and I were headed to a friend's for a picnic and we were making a dessert. Matt asked me to open up a can for him, so I did. You know how can openers work, right? You twist them around the top of the can until the lid pops up a little bit. Then you grab the lid with your finger and open the can. Well, as I was opening the lid... well, now I have a band-aid and a bum index finger.

And then, just before bed, Matt had been burning a candle. I liked the smell and wanted to see what kind it was. Matt had just blown the candle out, so the wax was still nice and hot. And as I lifted up the candle to see what kind it was... yep, you guessed it... wax all over the floor. So I grabbed a towel to try and get the wax out of the carpet. Unbeknownst to me, there had been some soot from the wick in the wax. And as I scrubbed the towel on the carpet...yep. Soot all over our beige carpet.... So if anyone knows how to get soot out of carpet, let me know.

All three of the things might not have happened to me if I had been thinking wisely. If I had been actively thinking about my actions, these things would probably not have happened to me. Such is living a wise life. We can't go through life mindlessly without thinking about how we are going to act. We need to put some effort into it.

Have you ever heard the saying, “Knowledge talks, wisdom listens”? Or how about, “Fool me once, shame on you. Fool me twice, shame on me”? Or how about, “Only the wisest and the stupidest of people never change.”

Wisdom is an important part of culture. There are so many sayings on wisdom and being wise. The search for wisdom is part of every culture that has existed, including ours. To be considered wise is a high honor in many cultures. But what does it mean to be wise? What does it mean to have wisdom?

Our verses for today begin here, with a warning to be careful how we live not as unwise people, but as wise. The writer of this general letter, who was probably a disciple of Paul rather than Paul himself, gives a word of caution. These Gentile Christian believers are called to live as wise people. But what does that mean – to live as a wise person?

Wisdom was hugely important in Jewish tradition. Just look at the Old Testament – we call a whole section “wisdom literature.” This section includes Job, Ecclesiastes, Psalms, Proverbs. Some scholars also include Song of Solomon. Wisdom wasn’t just some you could attain intellectually. One scholar states that “wisdom is really an approach to life, a way of looking at the world and...a way of living out in very deliberate, rational ways a commitment to God.” That’s a different definition than we give to wisdom, isn’t it? Most of us think people are wise because they are smart or make good decisions...or “wise” decisions....but that’s not what the Old Testament notion of wisdom was. Wisdom was a practice of life, a way of life patterned on obedience to God’s law. Living a wise life meant that you lived life with a purpose. You didn’t wander around aimlessly being morally ignorant; wisdom is the opposite of that. Living out wisdom meant that a person left foolishness behind and made a conscious effort to determine what God’s will was for their lives. When they had determined it, they lived it out. But it wasn’t always easy for them. And it isn’t easy for us to live out this kind of wisdom in our lives, is it? There is always something working against us and making things difficult and trying to discourage us.

Believers are called to exercise prudence in their behavior. Some scholars have suggested that believers had become lax in their behavior and had been making some bad choices. They had become almost arrogant and inconsiderate of others because they had decided to follow Christ and others had not. This type of attitude is dangerous and has the potential to turn people away from following Christ instead of inviting them. Believers were being advised to be a

little bit more deliberate and thoughtful in choosing how they were going to behave.

Our verses continue their warnings: Make the most of the time because they days are evil. Do not be foolish, but understand what the will of the Lord is. So we've talked a little bit about what wisdom meant in Old Testament tradition – a way of life. It's import to remember that that OT tradition was still alive and well in the early church. Even though Paul may not have written this letter, it is filled with Paul's theology, which included the wisdom of the Old Testament. This tradition was part of the early Christian tradition as well, even though many converts came from pagan backgrounds in Asia Minor. It was alive and well in ancient Ephesus.

The next two verses caution us to make the most of the time, to not be foolish, and to understand what the will of the Lord is. Some scholars suggest that what the author meant here by telling believers to “make the most of the time” was that they and we should invest our time and energy into things that are worthwhile. That's pretty self-explanatory. But just how are we to not be foolish and to understand what the will of the Lord is? Don't some people spend their lives trying to figure out what God will is for them?

Not being foolish in this culture meant that a person did not partake of the pagan ways of society. They stayed away from anything that would displease God. Living in wisdom allowed these early Christians to live a pious life despite the immoral and hostile society they found themselves in. They always looked for ways that God could turn negative experiences into something wonderful. How often do we look for the wonderful in a negative experience? Never? Sometimes? Often? As a believer in Christ, you can trust that God is doing something through every experience, even if you can't figure out what purpose it holds.

To be able to discern what the will of the Lord is, one must first develop a set of spiritual senses that have resulted from a transformation and renewal of the mind and heart. Paul instructs believers in Romans not to be conformed to the world, but to be transformed by the renewing of their minds. After their minds have been transformed, then they will be able to test and approve what God's will is. Ephesians picks up that same thought. When living out a life of wisdom, our minds and hearts will be transformed and renewed. As we come to have a greater faith and trust in the Lord, our minds and hearts will become attuned to his will for our lives. We will gain “spiritual senses” to what God wants for our

lives. In contrast, foolish people will not be able to discern God's will because they haven't yet allowed their minds and hearts to be transformed.

Our verses so far have cautioned us on how we are to live and not to live. Now they move to telling us what we should be filled up with. Scripture says we should be filled with the Spirit. So, the question is... what fills you up? What fills up your life? What do you spend most of your time doing, working on, thinking or worrying about?

For most people, they would probably say something like: work/job/career, family, taking care of kids, taking care of parents, taking care of the house, laundry, yard work, vacation, church, volunteering...does this list sound familiar to you? I may have left out a few things, but you get the idea. We are busy people. We live in a busy culture. And our culture says that we should be filled up with material things, with our careers, with what other people think about us and say about it, with being liked and accepted. But let me ask you, if we are supposed to be filled with the Spirit, when do we have time?

Have you ever examined the things that fill you up from day to day? Think about it for a minute. We are talking this morning about wise living, right? And the practice of wisdom not being something that we attain intellectually, but a way of life. A way of life that is patterned on God's law and showing our commitment to God. Have you ever thought about those things that fill up your life and whether or not they show your commitment to God? Well, I'm giving you a chance right now. Remember those things that fill up your days? Reflect on whether or not they are helping you to practice wisdom in your life.

Part of practicing wisdom in life is leaving foolishness behind. It is avoiding wasteful and reckless living. It was very difficult for the early Christians. Their society was all about extravagance and wastefulness. When society saw these Christians acting differently than society dictated, it was amazed and responded with hostility. It was their way of life and now these Christians were refusing to be part of it? Who did they think they were? But these Christians didn't care; they knew they had something lasting. And we know, too. We have a relationship with Jesus that is lasting. So how do we fill up our lives accordingly?

One way Scripture suggests for us to be filled up is what you are all doing right now – and that's worship. Every one of you showed up this morning to meet with our God and worship. You showed up to be with this community of

believers, to sing, to listen, to pray and to commune with God. You are being filled up right now. The Spirit is with you and will continue to be with you. The verb is “be filled” – present tense – a continuous experience. You see, we don’t just get filled up with the Spirit on Sundays. We are able to be filled up every day of the week. We should let being filled with the Spirit be the first thing that we are filled up with. It should be the first thing on our agenda. When that happens, we can’t help but praise God and thank him for his goodness.

These verses lend themselves well to today, I think. They speak about the same things that we struggle with today. It’s encouraging to know that we are not the only ones who struggle with living well. Others great saints before us have gone through the very same struggle to live well. Think of how much we can learn from them!

Living the Christian life is and has always been both a challenge. Some find it impossible to live a Christian live amidst their present culture, but it is possible, you just have to think wisely about your actions before you do them. If you actively think about what you want to do before you do it, Christ will show forth in your actions. Wisdom will show forth in your actions. All we need to do is put a little effort into it.

Thanks be to God.