

Living Wisely – Making the Most of Time***The Rev. Christi O. Brown******FPC Morningsong Service******August 19, 2018***Ephesians 5:15-20

Today's passage is from one of my favorite books of the Bible, the letter to the Ephesians. Full of hope and encouragement—particularly for peace and unity among all—it has inspired me since I was a young girl. It can actually be read end-to-end in under 12 minutes. And I highly recommend trying it.

This is a Pauline letter written to the Ephesians, but it speaks of the church in universal terms and was likely intended to be circulated to many other early churches as well. This letter is prayerful, liturgical and doxological. In many places it resembles a panegyric, a speech full of accolades and praise that you might hear at an honorary dinner.

There are six chapters of Ephesians. The first three are dogmatic, and the last three are didactic. Our passage today is from the latter half, full of practical instructions for Christian behavior. Hear now the word of God:

¹⁵Be careful then how you live, not as unwise people but as wise, ¹⁶making the most of the time, because the days are evil. ¹⁷So do not be foolish, but understand what the will of the Lord is. ¹⁸Do not get drunk with wine, for that is debauchery; but be filled with the Spirit, ¹⁹as you sing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs among yourselves, singing and making melody to the Lord in your hearts, ²⁰giving thanks to God the Father at all times and for everything in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.

*This is the Word of God for the people of God. **Thanks be to God.***

Let us pray:

God of Grace, illumine our hearts and minds with your light, revealing yourself to us today, that we might hear your word for our lives. In your most holy and gracious name we pray, Amen.

Sermon

Two weeks ago I preached in the traditional services on a passage from chapter 4 of Ephesians. I shared that a Presbyterian pastor I knew in Durham, along with a Duke Divinity School professor, had written a commentary on the letter the Ephesians. In it, they wrote about how they had polled others on what they thought the most important word in the vocabulary of the Christian life was. What word the Christian life could not do without.

There were many wonderful answers they received, including important virtues like love and humility. But in a way it was a trick question, because their opinion was that the word that should be at the top of that list was the word “therefore.”¹ Their reasoning was that throughout Scripture, “therefore” often signals the link between its talk of God and its talk of human conduct. Everywhere the pattern is the same. God loves us; therefore, we should love one another. Jesus died to sin; therefore, we too should die to sin. Jesus was raised from the dead; therefore, we too should walk in newness of life. God sent the Spirit; therefore, let us walk by the Spirit.

In the letters of Paul, “therefore” frequently marks a transition from theological exposition to moral exhortation. Our actions are a response to God’s acts. The gospel comes to us in both the indicative and imperative moods, factual statements and commands. So the pattern is that we first hear the facts about God, and then we are commanded to live our lives in a similar way. And the word “therefore” is often the

¹ Harvard, Joseph S. and Allen Verhey. *Belief: A Theological Commentary on the Bible: Ephesians*. (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2011), 131.

link between the two. In other words, when you hear or read the word “therefore” in Scripture, pay attention, because what’s coming next is our part in the action.

In its literal translation, our passage for today starts with the word therefore:

“Therefore, be careful then how you live, not as unwise people but as wise, making the most of the time.” In fact, this whole chapter began with this key word as well:

“Therefore be imitators of God, as beloved children, and live in love, as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us.” (vv1-2). The word therefore is used four times alone in these first 20 verses of this chapter. In other words, the author of this letter wants us to really listen and pay attention.

I remember my friend Dan giving presentations in an engineering class at Clemson. He would start circling his laser pointer in a frenzy and say, “Listen up, because I’m going fast.” He literally got wound up because he was just so excited about the material and felt such an urgency to communicate the information to us in a short allotment of time. I imagine the author of this letter felt much the same way as my friend. His repetitive use of therefore is equivalent to Dan’s urgent plea to “Listen up because I’m going fast!”

There was so much going on at the time this letter was written. The writer even says the days are evil. He felt like these early Christian communities—who were fledglings trying to establish themselves—were bombarded by societal false teachings, ways of being and mixed messages. They had to filter out what was true from what was false. How they should live as Christians in a world that operated on other values. Interesting, isn’t it, how it sounds similar to what we still face today as Christians? The difference being that now we have what feels like thousands more societal elements bombarding us. It is estimated that in this age of information

overload, we receive the equivalent of 174 newspapers worth of information a day. And that every day the average person him or herself alone produces six newspapers worth of information—a 200-fold increase compared to just 25 years ago.²

So it's fitting that this passage starts with the words therefore and be careful. Be careful can also be translated beware, behold, take a look at, and take heed. There's a sense of discernment in this concept. We need to look around us and take heed of the situation in order to discern how to live wisely. And here are some other clues from the original meanings of words from this passage. To live can be translated to walk, to regulate one's life, to conduct oneself. And wise can mean skilled, forming the best plans and using the best means to execute those plans. And making the most can mean to redeem, to buy up for oneself, and even to rescue from loss. In other words, making the most of time is the opposite of losing time to frivolous things. And this kind of time refers to an opportune and seasonable time. A critical time when it's imperative to do the best with it that you can. And the days of evil can be translated full of labor, annoyances, hardships. Do not be foolish means do not act without reason, in senseless or rash ways.

And so another interpretation of this passage by yours truly, based upon the original concepts, but updated for our current time, might be:

Therefore, take heed and discern how you walk and conduct yourself in life, not as unwise people but as skilled ones, forming great plans upon your wise discernment and using the best means you have to live those out. Don't waste time, but redeem it, making the most of these critical moments in your life, especially when your days feel full of frustration and hardships. Do not act rashly, rather consider what God would want you to do in each situation you

² "Welcome to the Information Age." Feb 11, 2011. <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/science/science-news/8316534/Welcome-to-the-information-age-174-newspapers-a-day.html>

face. Do not look to earthly pleasures that society tries to sell you on—like alcohol or pills or retail therapy—for genuine happiness, for these will not sustain you. Instead, find joy in the Holy Spirit who truly fulfills you. Take time to worship God with your brothers and sisters in Christ, making a joyful noise unto the Lord. And at all times and all places, give thanks and praise to God in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.

In our current day and time, with all that we face, this passage is a gift to us. A gem. An important reminder that it is critical, perhaps more than ever, that we make the most of the moments we are given here on earth. We are not to wait until heaven for the kingdom come, but to strive to live that out here and now. Thy will be done, thy kingdom come, on earth as it is in heaven. But in these days of evil, these days of hardship, it can be difficult to live this out, right?

As a Christian, but particularly as a parent of young kids, I have always loved this particular blog post by Glennon Doyle which contrasts *kairos* time, like the kind mentioned in this Bible passage, with *chronos* time that we experience via the clock. Hear what she has to say:

There are two different types of time. Chronos time is what we live in. It's regular time, it's one minute at a time. [As parents of young children,] it's staring down the clock till bedtime time, it's ten excruciating minutes in the Target line time, it's four screaming minutes in time-out time, it's two hours till daddy gets home time. Chronos is the hard, slow passing time we often live in.

Then there's Kairos time. Kairos is God's time. It's time outside of time. It's metaphysical time. Kairos is those magical moments in which time stands still. [*She goes on to say:*] I have a few of those moments each day, and I cherish them.

Like when I actually stop what I'm doing and really *look* at [at my daughter]. I notice how perfectly smooth and brownish her skin is. I notice the perfect

curves of her teeny elf mouth and her...brown eyes, and I breathe in her soft...smell. In these moments...all I can think is – *This is the first time I’ve really **seen** HER all day, and my **God** – she is **so** beautiful.* Kairos.

Or when I’m stuck in chronos time in the grocery line and I’m haggard and annoyed and angry at the slow check-out clerk. And then I look at my cart and I’m transported out of chronos. And suddenly I notice the piles of healthy food I’ll feed my children to grow their bodies and minds and I remember that most of the world’s mamas would die for this opportunity. This chance to stand in a grocery line with enough money to pay. And I just stare at my cart. At the abundance. The bounty. Thank you, God. Kairos.³

I like this writeup because it helps us think about how to find and live out those *kairos* moments, or God moments, in the midst of *chronos* time that we can’t escape. The truth is that we have to live through the chronos time of life’s demands and responsibilities. We can’t avoid those. It’s simply a part of being a human living on this earth. But we can look for and do our best to create more Kairos moments in the midst of chronos time.

Another helpful tool I keep thinking of when I think of this concept of making the most of time is the Time Management Matrix which was featured in Steven Covey’s book *The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People*. This matrix, originally created by Dwight Eisenhower, is a tool to help figure out what tasks are important versus urgent. Urgent activities require immediate attention, while important ones contribute to your mission, values and goals.

It turns out that to maximize productivity at work or in life, the goal is to spend time on things that are important but not urgent. And this is exactly what our passage is talking about today as well. Let’s look at this matrix a minute. *[Show slide.]*

³ <https://momastery.com/blog/2012/01/04/2011-lesson-2-dont-carpe-diem/>

Matrix Quadrants

- Important and Urgent – Medical Crises, Fires, Crying Babies
- Urgent but Not Important – Unnecessary meetings, interruptions
- Not Important & Not Urgent – time wasters, like games on your phone
- Important but Not Urgent – relationship building & strategic planning - ****red circle because most important quadrant to focus time**** (worship, family time, retreats, reflection)

The problem is that we're far more likely to deal with urgent activities, regardless of importance, because we can see them right in front of our faces. Think of an email or text coming in, a phone ringing, or a coworker barging into your office. Urgent matters are visible and insist on action. And though usually not important, they are often easy enough to do, and you can see immediate results, aka instant gratification. Think of deleting that text or email after you've replied.

Meanwhile, the activities in the quadrant where we should spend the most time in order to maximize our time, the important but not urgent quadrant, often don't have the immediate results, so we're less likely to tend to them. So unfortunately, most people spend way too little time, some as little as 5%, on the stuff that's truly important in life in the long term.⁴ *[Take slide down.]*

In many ways, this concept of where to truly focus our time is what the Pauline author of this letter was trying to get across. Of course this matrix didn't exist back then, but he was basically saying that if you want to live wisely and make the most of your time

⁴ <https://www.businessinsider.com/how-to-use-stephen-coveys-time-management-matrix-2015-12>

here on earth, you need to realize that what's truly important in life is where you need to focus your time. He even uses that sense of urgency in his writing—therefore, beware—to try to emphasize that the important things really should feel imperative versus those things in life that society deems urgent or which provide instant gratification.

He explains what's truly critical is to discern the will of the Lord in your life and do it. Not to get drunk on wine or any other fleeting pleasure, but to experience deeper joy by reading Scripture, singing psalms, and making melody unto the Lord in your heart. And this is why worship is so important. It helps us refocus on keeping the main thing the main thing. And in this Morningsong service, our band helps us do an excellent job of making a joyful noise unto the Lord. And of providing Kairos moments.

Yet unfortunately, when we're back out in the real world, it's hard not to get caught up in chronos time. The truth is, most of us know the things that are most important, and we know we should spend more time doing them. But it's just too easy to get sidetracked by the "urgent" tasks of life. For example, we mean to spend more time with our kids, but those emails and texts just keep coming, those grocery lists need making, the yard needs tending, and we either keep putting our kids off until we've run out of time for the day, or we're with them, but our full attention is not on them. I can raise my hand as being quite guilty of these things, but I am truly working on getting better. On leaving my phone in the house and getting outside with the kids. On taking breaks from tasks to focus on relationships. On taking time to read Scripture in the morning versus just having good intentions but never making it happen during the day.

If you're like me, and love to schedule things, then by all means, block off time on your calendar for these important activities or add it to your to do list. Then you'll see the instant gratification. I, along with this author, challenge all of us to find more ways to spend time doing the important things. The urgent things will not go away, and they do have to be tended to, but we *can* more wisely discern how to attend to both those and the important activities. I know we can, so I challenge all of us to start living more wisely, to make a commitment to work on this together.

And lastly, I have no idea why, but I have to mention it, because the whole time I've been thinking about and working on this sermon, I've had a secular song stuck in my head, that actually gets to this point. It was popular when I was in college, at a time when I seemed to have a lot more available time. It is by Dave Matthews and is ironically called Wasting Time.⁵ And the video is fabulous in that it depicts so many people "wasting time", which in reality is spending genuine quality time together. Kids from around the world are running, playing in water, and adults are hanging out. There's jump roping, music playing, singing & dancing. And they all have this look of pure joy on their faces, and they all just want to keep staying awhile longer. They were experiencing Kairos time. And we all have experienced and know the deep satisfaction of those times.

Therefore, as you go into this week, especially as school and programs kick back into full gear, live wisely, my friends. And although this may sound a little funny, make sure to spend time "wasting time" with God and loved ones.

All glory and honor be to God our Creator, Sustainer and Redeemer, Amen.

⁵ <https://genius.com/Dave-matthews-band-stay-wasting-time-lyrics>