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St. Paul's Lutheran Church
2100 16th Street SW
Austin, MN 55912-1749
Pastor Ted Barthels
Sermon preached on
August 26, 2018
14th Sunday after Pentecost

Scripture Lessons: Joshua 24:1-2a, 14-18, John 6:60-69
Hymns: 239; 413; 334; 313:3

Grace be unto you and peace from God our Father and our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

Sermon Text: Ephesians 5:15-20

See then that you walk circumspectly, not as fools but as wise,¹⁶ redeeming the time, because the days are evil.

¹⁷Therefore do not be unwise, but understand what the will of the Lord is. ¹⁸And do not be drunk with wine, in which is dissipation; but be filled with the Spirit, ¹⁹speaking to one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody in your heart to the Lord, ²⁰giving thanks always for all things to God the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ. (NKJV)

This is the Word of God.

Sanctify us, oh Lord, through Your truth. Your Word is truth. Amen.

In Christ Jesus, God our Savior, dear fellow Redeemed:

INTRO: "Be Careful!"

For parents these are words that are used frequently with young children as they grow and try new things. As parents we are always concerned for our children that they might be too daring, and venture into dangerous territory and get hurt. It starts when the children are very small and learning how to walk, then going down the stairs for the first time, "careful, be careful not to trip and fall." Before you know we are teaching them how to drive, and in those

first few driving lessons we are constantly warning them to be careful, careful of sharp corners, careful about other drivers, careful when learning how to parallel park. Then they get their license and are going on their first trip alone, and we tell them to be careful, don't go too fast, don't drive if you're get too tired. It really never stops. I still find myself urging care with my daughters. They are still my children and I care for them and don't want them to be needlessly hurt.

The Apostle Paul looked upon many of the Christians in the congregations where he worked as his spiritual children. And surely we are all the children of our heavenly Father. So it is that the words of our text come to us from a fellow Christian who loved his fellow Christians, as well as from God who inspired the Apostle Paul to write these words of instruction about life for our benefit. Paul still speaks to us saying --

THEME: Christian: Make your Way through Life Carefully.

Our first lesson for doing this is a lesson in --

I. Comprehending the Will of God.

As we make our way through daily life we find ourselves surrounded by the evil of this world with its vain philosophy and its worldly values. That is why the Apostle warns:

Ephesians 5:15-17 See then that you walk circumspectly, not as fools but as wise, ¹⁶redeeming the time, because the days are evil. ¹⁷Therefore do not be unwise, but understand what the will of the Lord is.

Circumspectly simply means looking around, keeping your eyes wide open for hazards, proceeding with care. We are not to behave as fools who don't think about the consequences of their actions, but as wise who realize that what we do and what we say and where we go all reflect not only on us, but on the Lord, and can dramatically impact us, and our lives, and our faith.

There was an old cop show that always began with the shift sergeant giving the oncoming shift its briefing, and as he sent them out on patrol he always concluded with, "Be careful out there!" So

as we get up in the morning and prepare ourselves for another day and we are reviewing what we need to be prepared to do, let us also remember that we are going out into the world and we need to *be careful out there*. Every day the devil is laying his snares to deceive us and trip us up. We do something as simple and pleasant as going to a state park, as we visited several this past week, and one is very likely to read signs or brochures that speak of this world being millions of years old, and coming into existence by chance happening called evolution.

That's just going to our state parks! The danger is far greater when we send our children off to the university where their ears will be filled with all kinds of godless nonsense regarding not only evolution, but worldly moral values in a number of areas, including cohabitation, homosexuality, and abortion. Along with that there is so much blatant hedonism, and corrupt language surrounding Christian young people as they go out into the world. Of course these things aren't limited to colleges and universities; they are around all of us. There is just so much intense psychological and intellectual pressure to conform. It has been said, "If you tell a lie often enough people will believe it." And that is one of the devil's tactics well practiced by the world.

And what about us? Are we arming ourselves against the influence of the world? Are we staying in the Scriptures and refreshing our knowledge of the truth? Are we really looking at what's around us in this world or are we allowing ourselves to become desensitized to this world's evil? The Apostle Paul also exhorts us in his epistle to the Romans:

Romans 12:2 And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what *is* that good and acceptable and perfect will of God.

Don't conform to the world! Be a genuine NON-conformist! There is only one way to do that. *Comprehend what the will of God is!*

It is when we are filled with that comprehension of what the will of God is for us that we are able stand against the wiles of the devil.

Ephesians 6:13-17 Therefore take up the whole armor of God, that you may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand. ¹⁴ Stand therefore, having girded your waist with truth, having put on the breastplate of righteousness, ¹⁵ and having shod your feet with the preparation of the gospel of peace; ¹⁶ above all, taking the shield of faith with which you will be able to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked one. ¹⁷ And take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God.

Those words from the chapter of Ephesians following our text really focus on the will of God for you. It is not all about the law, and yes it is true that I often say a big part of God being God is that He gets to make the rules. However, the Lord's own focus of His will for you is the gospel of your salvation. God would separate you out from the evil and sin of this world not with harsh threats, but with wondrous grace. That is God's will for all sinners. *"The Lord is not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance."* (2 Peter 3:9) He wants sinners to repent; to believe in Jesus, His Son, whom the Father sent down to this earth to save us from sin and death. He wants us to cling to the cross of Christ. Yes what the world sees as the foolishness of the cross is our hope of life and the wisdom of God. The world denigrates as foolishness what we know to be true, that one Man's tortuous death could and did atone for our sins, and not only for our sins, but also for the sins of the whole world! (1 John 2:2) That is the wonder of God's grace for a fallen mankind.

This is the will of God that we need to comprehend with every fiber of our being. This is the weapon that defeats the world, that quenches the devil's fiery darts of accusation, that strengthens us to make our way through life, that gives us the vision to see the hazards on life's path so we don't trip and fall, and lose our faith. This is what we need to walk circumspectly.

This past week we did a lot of hiking on Lake Superior's North Shore. Oh, the trails were well marked, but we still had to pay attention to follow the right trail to get where we wanted to go. We hiked along ridges to arrive at overviews providing beautiful vistas of the forest or lake or waterfalls, all parts of God's glorious creation! But even with prepared trails one always had to walk circumspectly, always watching. Sometimes on those ridges we

were hiking on the edge of steep drop-off. And there were always rocks or roots protruding from the ground that could easily trip up the careless hiker. And it wasn't the big ones that tripped you up, but that little rock or tree root protruding only a couple of inches above the rest of the path. And then there were boulders and rocks to climb around to get a better view of one or another water falls.

With all those hazards maybe we should have stayed at home? No, no, no. It was glorious to be out in God's creation in spite of the hazards along the way. We just needed to be careful, be prepared and know what to do you in different circumstances, and how to encourage and assist one another along the way. That is all Paul is telling us, and the result will be the same as on these wilderness hikes. You will find yourself—

II. Living with Joy in Your Hearts.

Paul isn't encouraging repression of joy but the very opposite, the enhancement of true joy. The world doesn't understand the joy that we have in our hearts as children of God. What the world pursues as joy may incite laughter for moment, but mostly it produces regret in the end. The hedonism of the world, living for fun, living for fleshly pleasure, forget the consequences, tomorrow we die anyway. Drunken parties in loud night clubs are often depicted as great times. Owning expensive homes, expensive cars and all the right toys, is thought of as true success and guaranteed happiness. Solomon called it vanity.

The Lord's prescription for living with joy sounds silly to the world. However it is the right prescription for true joy, joy in your hearts no matter what's going on, success or failure, health or sickness, and it doesn't end with regret, but rather with eternal bliss and glory.

We read of this joy in our text:

Ephesians 5:18-20 And do not be drunk with wine, in which is dissipation; but be filled with the Spirit, ¹⁹speaking to one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody in your heart to the Lord, ²⁰giving thanks always for all things to God the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.

“Be filled with the Spirit!” The Holy Spirit has called you by the gospel, He has called you to know Jesus as your Redeemer. He has called you to know the peace of sins forgiven! He has called you to know the hope of everlasting life! The Spirit has called you to know the joy of your salvation. Nothing can take away that joy, that hope, that peace! So let us speak to one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs. Yes, that is what we are doing in church, but you know sometimes confessional Lutherans can look pretty serious, and are not perceived as being joy-filled. Today we celebrate, CELEBRATE the Lord’s Supper. You are going to approach the Lord’s altar and here receive with the bread and wine the very body and true blood of Christ given and shed for you for the remission of your sins. You are given the most personal, intimate assurance of God’s love and forgiveness and His peace, and you turn around and walk back to your pew looking like you just got dental work done. How about some joy in your hearts to the Lord. When we have a potluck, especially our Christmas fellowship let’s not only visit, but let’s sing. And when we do, doesn’t it fill your hearts with joy?

But hold on, why stop when you leave church? How about spiritualizing “carpool karaoke?” Why not start your day singing:

“Now the shades of night are gone. Now the morning light has come. Lord may we be Thine today. Drive the shades of sin away.

“Fill our souls with heavenly light. Banish doubt and cleanse our sight. In thy service Lord today Help us labor Help us pray!”

(The Lutheran Hymnal 538:1,2)

And sing another joy filled tune:

“Oh, for a thousand tongues to sing My great Redeemer’s praise.
The glories of my God and King, the triumphs of His grace.

He breaks the power of cancelled sin. He sets the prisoner free;
His blood can make the foulest clean; His blood avails for me.”

(The Lutheran Hymnal 360:1,4)

Or just let loose with:

“What a Friend we have in Jesus, All our sins and griefs to bear.

What a privilege to carry Everything to God in prayer.”

(The Lutheran Hymnal 457:1a)

Make a melody in your heart to the Lord! Whatever the season, you have a hymn or spiritual song you love. Let it fill your heart with joy, the joy of the gospel. Let it lead you to thank God the Father of our Lord Jesus for everything. Everything means **everything!** The difficult times and trials as well as the days of happiness and success, for the Lord our God is with us to sanctify and bless us in all our ways. He will keep us safe in His saving will and grace unto everlasting life.

So Christian, make your way through life carefully, realizing how rare and precious it is that you do comprehend the will of God in His grace and love toward us. Make your way through life **carefully** filled with the Spirit, living with joy in your hearts to the Lord!

AMEN.

And the peace of God which passes all understanding shall keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.