

Choose Your Path Wisely!

Ephesians 5:15-20 -- Pentecost 13 August 22, 2021 – Good Shepherd, Beaver Dam

Paul shows us how important it is to keep on the right path by walking in the Spirit and being in the Word. Be very careful, then, how you live--not as unwise but as wise,¹⁶ making the most of every opportunity, because the days are evil.¹⁷ Therefore do not be foolish, but understand what the Lord's will is.¹⁸ Do not get drunk on wine, which leads to debauchery. Instead, be filled with the Spirit.¹⁹ Speak to one another with psalms, hymns and spiritual songs. Sing and make music in your heart to the Lord,²⁰ always giving thanks to God the Father for everything, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Brothers and sisters, "The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit(s)." (Galatians 6:18).

A well-known poem from American literature was written by Robert Frost. Perhaps, some of you remember it: The Road Not Taken.

Two roads diverged in a yellow wood,
And sorry I could not travel both
And be one traveler, long I stood
And looked down one as far as I could
To where it bent in the undergrowth;

And both that morning equally lay
In leaves no step had trodden black.
Oh, I kept the first for another day!
Yet knowing how way leads on to way,
I doubted if I should ever come back.

Then took the other, as just as fair,
And having perhaps the better claim,
Because it was grassy and wanted wear;
Though as for that the passing there
Had worn them really about the same,

I shall be telling this with a sigh
Somewhere ages and ages hence:
Two roads diverged in a wood, and I—
I took the one less traveled by,
And that has made all the difference.

What Robert Frost wrote about, I think, describes well what Paul has to say to us this morning about Christian living. Choosing one of two divergent paths through life will result in drastically different futures. Paul says in our text, "Be very careful, then, how you live." The Greek literally says, "Watch closely how you walk about." Because if you don't watch closely the path of life that God has set before you, you might get off onto a trail the devil has set before you for your destruction. This morning we want to consider this thought:

Choose Your Path Carefully!

I. Dodge the devil's detours.

Paul tells us very clearly why we need to choose our path carefully. He says simply, "**The days are evil.**" (v. 16) Christians living in Paul's day faced many of the same temptations that we face today. There was sexual immorality. There were intellectual elite who pushed their philosophies and laughed at the idea of a resurrection from the dead. There were weekend orgies in the temples. There was the press of every day business and life, which burdened the Christian with worries about things that weren't important. If all those temptations were around in Paul's day, the Christian walk is even more dangerous today. Jesus and the apostles warned that the world would become even more evil in the last days. "Walk carefully," Paul says, "because the days are evil."

Paul writes, "Not as unwise, but as wise." With these words Paul is telling us to look down the road before we make our choices, to consider the consequences of our actions before we act. Let me give an example. It might be something as simple as buying a new car. I would love to own a Mercedes

automobile. I could probably arrange the financing, but after a few months the payments would probably stretch my finances pretty thin. So I have to make some adjustments. I can get another job, which will take precious time away from my wife and our home. If I had young children I could decide to not send them to a Christian school, which may affect their spiritual lives. I could cut my church contributions in half, which itself is going to say something about the path I've chosen to walk. That's just one little decision. There are many decisions to be faced as we walk through life and the devil wants to use them to get us on his detour which leads away from God's Word and his will for our lives on this earth. Young people choose an occupation. People choose friends. They choose a spouse. They choose where to live. Paul says, "Don't be unthinking when you make those choices. Think! Be wise! Look out for detours that take you away from God!"

Paul says, **"Making the most of every opportunity." (v.16)** Literally, the phrase means to "redeem the time." It reminds me of the Roman poet, Horace, who said "Carpe diem", which means "Seize the day!" Everyone is accustomed to detours -- especially during this season of the year, which some people like to call "Road Construction.". If there is one thing you learn about detours, it's that they always take twice the time as the regular route does. Last month, when I was driving to my sister and brother-in-law's, north of Medford, I came to a detour on Highway 33. I followed the detour south, thinking that it would take me around Cambria. No, it took me all the way south to Highway 60, so when I finally got to I-39 I had to go back north. Are we following some of those time-consuming detours in our lives? It's easy to get so involved in a hobby, or pursuing a sport, or in something else that we just lose track of the time. And maybe the devil's only purpose is to keep us from spending time growing in our faith and doing the Lord's work! Stay away from those detours that keep you from making the most of every opportunity you have to seek the good of God's kingdom!

Paul himself gives a good example of getting side-tracked. **"Do not get drunk on wine, which leads to debauchery." (v.18)** The person who stops for three or four drinks after work before he or she comes home tells the children, "I don't have time to play" or "I'm too tired." There is little energy left to help with household chores and meal preparation, and little patience to listen and be a good parent and spousal companion. Nor is it just the habitual drinking Paul is warning against. When you drink too much, even just the one time, how good are you at keeping an eye on your path? The devil knows all too well that it's harder to say "No" to temptation when alcohol has deadened our good sense and reason. Paul says, "Don't get drunk on wine!" because you won't be watching out for the devil's detours!

Friends, how well have you watched the road the Lord has set before you? How carefully have you been walking the Christian's walk? How many detours did you take? Most of us are better at watching the sights in this world than watching our feet on the path.

Isn't it amazing that we are still God's children? It is not by our own thinking and choosing. It is only by the grace of God. We have a God who cares about his people. We have a Savior who died to forgive our sins and who now sits on his throne in heaven as our Good Shepherd to carefully watch over us. When we followed the devil's detours, the Good Shepherd looked for us and found us and restored us to our walk with God. Don't ever think that Jesus is going to make you walk this walk alone! He will always be with us!

Having such a God and Savior, though, is no reason to not choose our path carefully. How do we do that? It's when we

II. Stride with the Spirit.

Paul says, **“Do not be foolish but understand what the Lord’s will is.” (v. 17)** It’s interesting that Paul puts “foolish” in direct opposition to “understanding the Lord’s will.” You can be the most intelligent person on planet earth, but if you do not know what God’s will is, you are a fool. You know nothing.

Paul adds, “Be filled with the spirit.” Literally it says to keep on being filled with the Spirit. If a person is a believer in Jesus, it is because the Holy Spirit has entered that person’s heart and created faith there. Consequently, everyone who is a believer in Jesus is filled with the Spirit of God.

Why does Paul say, “Keep on being filled with the Spirit?” It’s very simple. Imagine that your heart is like a tank - a gas tank, if you will. When you were born, that tank was empty. You had no faith. You did not have the Spirit of God. But through the word of God and the sacrament of baptism, the Holy Spirit entered into you and your heart was now filled with the Holy Spirit. Your tank was full. Only there is one small problem with the human heart. It leaks. If it is just sitting around and doing nothing, eventually the faith will leak out and the Holy Spirit will depart. So you have to keep on filling the tank and keeping the heart filled with the Holy Spirit.

Paul tells us how we can keep on striding with the Spirit. **“Speak to one another with psalms, hymns and spiritual songs. Sing and make music in your heart to the Lord, always giving thanks to God the Father for everything, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.” (v. 18-19)** First, he says, talk to one another with psalms and hymns and spiritual songs. I don’t know where that happens better than in a Bible class where you talk with other Christians and study God’s Word together, or in a family devotion where God’s Word is read and discussed by the members of the family.

In few weeks we will again have Sunday school for all ages. Here is an opportunity for all of us to join together in the study of God’s Word so that we can continue to be filled with the Spirit and be empowered to stride through life with him. We do that also with our personal and family devotional time.

Paul says, “Sing and make music in your heart to the Lord.” I like to think that this is what happens all day long with us. You’ve read a portion of God’s Word when you got up in the morning. Perhaps you didn’t have time to think about it thoroughly. But all day long you remember what it said. Or maybe you remember a passage or two you memorized that day. Then you meditate on it. You reflect on it. It becomes a song in your heart.

The result is that you never lose sight of your foot on the path that God has placed before you. One of the Easter stories that I have always appreciated is the story of the two disciples on the way to Emmaus. As the two disciples trudged along in their sadness and in their confusion, they met Jesus who disguised himself as a stranger. When they told him the story of Jesus’ death, the stranger started to show them from the Holy Scriptures how all this had to happen, and how Jesus had to rise from the grave. They were so excited! They thought that maybe they had been walking down the wrong path by believing in Jesus! Suddenly their faith was restored. They invited the stranger to eat with them and spend the night. At the meal, when he broke bread, they saw it was Jesus!

But it was the Word of God that first opened their eyes! It was the Word of God which put their feet on the path of God! What does it mean to “walk with Jesus” or to “walk with the Spirit?” It means that we are using God’s Word and the Spirit is filling our hearts.

Robert Frost in his poem that has become well-known doesn’t make a judgment on which path is better. He only states that choosing one or the other will result in different outcomes. Paul today makes it clear for us that the choosing he is talking about has eternally different outcomes. Don’t get

lost on your walk through life! Choose your path wisely! Dodge the devil's detours! Stride with the Spirit and in the Word. Amen

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