

Ephesians 5:15-20

Pentecost 13; August 22, 2021

As many of you know, Nancy and I bought a camper last Spring. (It's hard to miss across the parking lot.) We rediscovered camping last Summer. But we decided if we were going to continue to do camping, a tent was less appealing than it once was. When we went on vacation for the last two weeks, we took it for our first extended camping trip. We started in Door County, worked our way across the U.P. of Michigan and down some of the western side of Wisconsin.

There was one night that we decided to spend with my parents at their cottage near Spooner. I wasn't sure if the road that they were on was going to give me enough room to be able to back into their driveway. The worst thing would be for me to get stuck on our first trip. I am very much a newbie when it comes to backing it into a spot, the last thing in the world that I wanted was to get stuck. Besides, we are still very much getting used to working together in backing a camper into a spot. It used to be said, that a marriage could survive if you can wall paper together. I think a marriage can survive, if you can maneuver a camper back into a campsite together. We're getting better, but have a little way to go.

So, we decided to drop it off in the parking lot at our WELS church in Spooner. I pulled it into the parking lot, and the pastor came out and chatted with us for a while. I asked him where he would like me to leave it overnight. He pointed to the far corner in the parking lot, and told me to back it into the spot across the parking lot. I looked at him and said, *"back across all the WHOLE parking lot."* He had a big smile on his face, and I knew he was up to something. He chuckled and said that he had driven Semi trailers for 8 years, including being an instructor for some of those years. He looked at me and said, *"I'll help you; follow my directions"* He walked along side of my truck and told me which way I should be turning my while. Across the parking we went going exactly where he wanted me to go. Following his directions, it was easy to do. He wasn't trying to humiliate me or my driving skills, he just wanted to help me in the learning process of how to back a camper.

It made me think about the Apostle Paul and this young congregation in Ephesus. Paul's heart went out to them. He knew how hard it would be for them to follow God's will. That's really what the whole book of Ephesians is – a letter of encouragement. Paul wanted them to treasure what they had **"in Christ."** He begins: **"Be very careful, then, how you live—not as unwise but as wise, making the most of every opportunity, because the days are evil."**

We live a wise life, not because we can earn our way to heaven, but because we have heaven in Christ. God has rescued us. That's really the main point of the whole book of Ephesians. God has adopted us as his children. He has taken us who are spiritually dead, and made us alive in Christ. He has brought us together, along with millions of other Christians across the world. He wants us to imitate him. He wants us to get rid of bitterness and rage. He wants us to focus on Him. As we focus on Him and His Word, we become humble, gentle and patient with each other. Paul wanted this small congregation of believers to stand out from the rest of the people who lived around them.

Paul wants us to also step back and think and marvel and treasure what we have in Christ. When we do, we can't help but think: *"How could God love someone like me, and do all that for me?"* One of the parts of camping that I really love is the campfire. I can sit outside for hours at night in front of the campfire. There's something peaceful about it. It gives you really a chance to just think. It gives me a chance to think about how much God has really blessed me.

God wants us to live a wise life. Yet, he also knows how hard it is to do that. You know how hard it can be at times. You live the struggle. It's not just a struggle with the people who live around you. Sometimes, it's a struggle that lives in us. Literally, Paul says that we are to *walk acrobatically. Walk as if you are walking a tightrope.* We don't just meander through the walk of our Christian life. Our movements are planned and careful and accurate as if we were walking on a tightrope. Why? Because our life is about showing our appreciation and thankfulness to God for what he has done. Don't walk **"as unwise but as wise."**

As you and I both know, wisdom is much more than just knowledge. Wisdom is about how you apply that knowledge in life. Wisdom is sometimes understanding what is vital and valuable and what is not. Looking at life through God's Wisdom is knowing what is valuable and vital to God and what isn't.

Paul says that one of the ways that we live a life of wisdom is **“making the most of every opportunity.”** Maybe to help to understand what Paul is saying here, is to think of it this way. Think how exciting it is to go into a store and find something that is really a good deal. I mean, one of those really big deals. So big, that you buy up all of that item on the shelf. Ever found a bargain like that? That’s the thought behind those words of **“making the most of every opportunity.”** You are willing to do whatever it takes to share God’s wisdom with people. You are willing to do almost anything to build a relationship up with people. Quite a number of years ago when we lived in Florida, I remembered sitting in the home of one of our members. I was just one of those young kids that come out of Sem. They brought out some snacks to eat – boiled peanuts. They loved them. They were gross in my opinion – slimy and wet. But I ate them. To wash it down, you need a big glass of tea. They handed me a big old glass. I don’t like tea. But I drank it down. Later, we would laugh about it. But that’s **“making the most of every opportunity.”**

Watch for those opportunities to share Jesus with others. Watch out for those opportunities to build relationships with people. We also need to make **“the most of every opportunity”** to learn out about Jesus. The more we grow in our faith, the better we get in living that wise life. The more we grow in wisdom, the better we get in following Jesus.

The first campground that we stayed at on our vacation was Potawatomi State Park in Sturgeon Bay. I’m sure that I gave our neighbors some good entertainment that evening struggling to back into a site that should have been easy. The next day, we were talking with one of our neighbors. He thought about coming over and give me a hand, but he didn’t want to offend me. We laughed and I assured him that I would not have been offended at all. At that point, I would have welcomed his help. I will get better.

We all get better at following Jesus. Why? Because we know that we have a God who gave up his Son for us. We have a God that fills us with his Spirit so that we don’t live lives that are unwise. We have a God who has done everything for us. May God help all of us to follow Jesus **“always giving thanks to God the Father for everything, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.”** Amen.