

Sunday - August 16, 2009  
Pastor - Rev. Paula P. Werner  
Sermon - **How then shall we live?**

*“May the words of my mouth and the meditations of our hearts be formed by your grace, for you are our Lord, our rock and our redeemer. Amen.”*

Since the middle of July, those of you who follow and read the lectionary readings know that the Apostle Paul’s letter to the Ephesians has been one of the key scriptures. This is the 3<sup>rd</sup> Sunday that I will be using Paul’s words to direct our thoughts. Paul wrote both good, general advice and good, specific counsel to help this group of people in Ephesus, Turkey, as they were becoming the body of Christ. Remember, the church was not a large institution at this point. The church was comprised of people who had held pagan views and were now interested, changed, desirous of this new message that Jesus had taught. And, the early church was comprised of members who were Jews --- some still practicing Jews who also were intrigued by Jesus’ teachings and changed by his death and resurrection. This was the early church --- they didn’t meet in school classrooms, or strip mall storefronts, or any kind of building specifically set aside for this worship --- they mainly met in the out of doors, and in people’s homes. They are just learning HOW to live their lives as followers of Jesus Christ.

Paul’s letters help them. They knew one fact that you and I know today – death comes for everyone. We all have a 100% chance at mortality, dying! Yet since Jesus’ life, death, resurrection and ascension, there is promise of something more for us, of life beyond the grave. This life is not all there is. That’s the difference between the people meeting in house churches in the early years after Jesus’ resurrection and ascension. That’s the difference in you and me and the way we consider life, and our own death..... because we have this promise

We, particularly in 21<sup>st</sup> century America, do NOT like to think, much less talk about our own death. Some of us are squeamish about it. Some of us think it is morbid. Some of us want to deny any concept of mortality. Yet, I, like many of you have been touched with deaths that came unexpectedly. So, knowing that the present is what we have, and that our end in this life will come, we as Christians do well to spend some time reflecting on the meaning of our lives and in our lives.

We can get excellent counsel from the Bible. In fact, that’s what this book is --- excellent counsel on how to live one’s life --- through stories of folks who really messed up, and through stories in which goodness, and love prevailed.

Here’s what Paul has to say to us this morning: it’s a continuation of his words to the church members at Ephesus about Listen for the word of God for you today as we read **READ Ephesians 5:15-20** *This is the word of God for the people of God. Thanks be to God.*

What sticks with me from this reading is “Be careful how you live; be careful how you live.” So the first thought that comes to me is “How then shall we live?”

It’s a good question. How SHALL we live? In our earlier reading from the Old Testament about King Solomon, we were given a good guidance. King Solomon, son of the great King David, asked God for help in how he, King Solomon should live and rule. Solomon asked for wisdom..... and God granted it – so much so, that one example of Solomon’s wisdom is quoted as a standard..... Do you recall the story? Solomon is sitting as a judge --- which was one of the tasks of kings then and two women bring a baby and are arguing about which woman is the mother of the baby. They did not have DNA testing back then to figure it out. So Solomon just said that they should cut the baby in half and give half to each mother..... at hearing this, one woman, screamed, NO, let her have him. SHE was the true mother..... for the true mother would rather allow another woman to raise her child than see her child killed. Solomon had his answer as to the baby’s parentage. And history forever called Solomon wise. So, if you’re ever compared to Solomon, you’ll know it’s a good comparison.

The Apostle Paul also advises that the Ephesians – the early church members are to live wisely, making the most of the time. Making the most of time..... Forrest Hallmark’s journal helps us understand about making the most of time. Forrest was only 4 years old but at the end of each day, his mother would ask Forrest if there was anything he wanted to remember, and she would write it down for him in his journal. Here are a few entries:

Thurs., May 5, 1994 “I love dinosaurs. I love ‘em, love ‘em, love ‘em. I love sharks. T Rex is the most fearess hunter. My days are getting different now cause we’re doing different stuff. Why do bunny rabbit hop? I just don’t know how bunny rabbit hop.

Wed. May 25, 1994 I’m happy about my Stegosaurus. I don’t know why my Pterodactyl’s sick (only for 3 days). I love my dinosaurs.

Sun., June 12, 1994 “I’m happy today. I wish we goe’d on a hike and I wish I could catch a butterfly. I played on my tricycle. I slipped and almost fell but I didn’t. I ran over Brownie’s tail and leg. Brownie growled. I said I’m sorry. I want to go on a hike sometime.

Four year old Forrest’s observations of his days are amusing, touching, funny statements in the life of a bright little boy. Two weeks after this final entry, Forrest was killed in an automobile accident together with his brother and grandfather.

Knowing that, what strikes you about the journal entries? What emotions arise ? Aren’t his wishes to go on a hike, to want to know answers to questions about bunnies – more touching. Doesn’t each statement wondering about answers to life carry more weight now, knowing that his quest and his experiences here in this life were cut short. With death as its companion, each moment of life becomes instantly more compelling. Life framed by death takes on a new look and meaning.

The Apostle Paul tells us: **Make the most of time**.....in other words, make your life count. I’ve often heard people give this illustration, “If

Jesus were to come into my house, would I pleased to have him see the amount of time I spend on ..... (you fill in the blank)..... is this really what I want to spend my life on? If this is my last day living, is this worthy of my time, attention and effort. Is it worthy of keeping me from other pursuits and people and needs? Paul told the Ephesians “make the most of your time, because the days are evil.” What I think he’s trying to communicate to us today, is that there are many trivial, superficial, vacuous wastes of our time..... and if we are wise, we will constantly and consciously make our choices in what we are to be thinking about, spending time and effort on,

How then shall we live? Paul told the Ephesians **not to get drunk**. Now why get he get so specific with this admonishment? Most of us realize that drinking – especially excessive drinking and drunkenness brings on pain to the individual and a family I think Paul either specifically mentioned drinking because it was a definite problem among the Ephesian church members, or Paul was helping them understand a principal and used drinking as his example. Paul was teaching them that drinking is a strategy for not truly living, for not being fully present and active in life – not dealing with life. So drinking is one way Paul can all to our attention that we are not to surrender to behaviors that escape reality, or deaden our senses, or diminish our relationships with others.

When Paul says, “do not get drunk” he is making a strong statement about us not giving up. We were not created to be quitters—not when we have so very much to live for..... and I mean by this, not just eating, sleeping, breathing kind of living, but truly embracing all that life has to offer kind of living. That’s what Paul is referring to with his words in Ephesians, to “not get drunk with wine but to be filled with the spirit.”

How then shall we live? One principle is: make the most of the time we are given. Life is a gift. The present time is just that, a present. Secondly, we are to not try to escape reality by behaviors that keep us from God and others; instead we are to open ourselves to God’s spirit.

How then shall we live? Thirdly, we are to **understand what the will of the Lord is.**” We are to seek it, and let it fill and permeate us and bless us. God wants to work in us --- we are the hindrance. Let’s stop being a hindrance. The will of God is that love should reign. Love is the relationship of the trinity – Father, Son and Holy Spirit (or for you Shack devotees Papa, Jesus and Sarayu) The will of God is that humankind live in love with God and with one another. That is yours and my mission, our goal, our objective – to put it in more business-like 21<sup>st</sup> century terms.

**Seek wisdom, make the most of time, not use negative behaviors to distance us from our relationships, and understand the will of God.** These are what I consider to be the learnings from this particular passage for us today in responding to the question, How shall we live? Yet, these are not the sum total of wisdom from the Bible to respond to this question. So I thought we might share a bit with one another..... **what Bible verse do you feel gives you wisdom to instruct your life?** In response to the question, How then shall we live? What verse from scripture informs you?

Philippians 4:8 Whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is pleasing, whatever is commendable, if there is any excellence and if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things.”

Mark 9:24 “I believe; help my unbelief.”

Luke 12:48 “to whom much has been given, much will be required”

“Life is not measured by the number of breaths we take, but by the moments that take our breath away. ”How, then, shall we live? By Wayne Muller

It might be helpful during these waning days of summer..... as August comes to a close to spend some time reflecting on How you are living, and perhaps how you'd like to live differently.

I would live my life with kindness

I would savor --- a beautiful work of art, music, a sunrise or sunset, the sound of rain hitting a tin roof and watching lightning bolts play arouses the sky and behind the clouds,

I would savor great tickets to a major league football game, a NY play, a walk hand-in-hand with my spouse, throwing a frisbie to my dog,

I'd try to see humor in more of laugh, and laugh at life no matter what.

I really WOULD say encouraging things to everyone, everyday.

What joy will you find in your day? What peace, what comfort?

And for you, where is God in all this?