

“Be Filled With the Spirit!”
B Pentecost 12, Ephesians 5:15-20
August 15, 2021; 10:00 am
Congregational UCC, Buena Vista, CO
Rev. Rebecca K. Poos

Ephesians 5:15-20 (NRSV)

¹⁵ Be careful then how you live, not as unwise people but as wise, ¹⁶ making the most of the time, because the days are evil. ¹⁷ So do not be foolish, but understand what the will of the Lord is.

¹⁸ Do not get drunk with wine, for that is debauchery; but be filled with the Spirit, ¹⁹ as you sing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs among yourselves, singing and making melody to the Lord in your hearts, ²⁰ giving thanks to God the Father at all times and for everything in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.

HOW THEN SHALL WE LIVE?

Did you figure out what your calling in life is? Since we talked about two weeks ago? Nope? Still working on it? A lot has happened in two weeks in our lives, our communities, our country. It seems almost ludicrous to try to think bigger—beyond our mere survival on the planet—as so many forces—natural, accidental and human caused alike—seem to barrage us every day. Clamor for our attention.

We are faced with challenges from every direction and of every kind—something new seems to come up every day—every hour even. Simply responding to what’s right in front of us—what needs to be dealt with in the moment—takes all our energy and attention.

Pausing, taking deep breaths and contemplating the deeper and broader meaning of life and the calling of our faith to live that life most fully “in the Spirit” is just not that easy to do in these days. Or even *remember* to consider contemplating the Bigger Picture!

So, if you haven’t figured out “the calling to which you’ve been called” for this month or this season—past, present or future—don’t sweat it too much! Take another deep breath. We’re all paddling as hard as we can. Reaching out to love, care and respond to the situations and needs around us.

And that is enough. We are—every one of us—no matter where we find ourselves on life’s journey right now—is doing and *being* enough. We are beloved of God, loving our neighbors, and probably needing to do a little more (or a lot more) caring for ourselves. Our own souls need tending and nurturing right alongside all the care and concern we pour into others.

Are you breathing yet?

ENCOURAGEMENT NOT ORDERS

And so, into these interesting times in which we live, come these 6 little verses from Paul’s Letter to the Ephesians. They’re a little “Guidebook for the Road”—these instructions, and really quite rich in wisdom and insight—but they don’t get off on a very good foot!

“Be careful, then how you live.” Many translations start out this way. Reminds me of a chiding little song from Sunday School in my youth:

“Oh, be careful little eyes, what you see....

Oh, be careful little ears, what you hear...

For the Father up above is looking down in love....

Oh, be careful little eyes what you see.”

We have that judgmental image of God—though supposedly “loving” (!) pretty embedded in our psyches, and definitely in our theology, don’t we?! I immediately have a memory of a teacher shaking a finger at me as I learned that song, probably about age 5. But I digress!

A much better rendering of this opening line to this passage, according to scholars, would be:

“Pay really close attention to how to live.”

And, thus what follows is heard as the encouraging word that it’s meant to be.

ENCOURAGEMENT NOT ORDERS

“Pay really close attention to how to live.”

How do we *do* that? By walking humbly and closely with God and one another. It’s that simple and that complex, all rolled up at once. These six short verses—Guidelines for the Christian Life—lay out a blueprint for living the life of faith.

To walk on this earth as faith-filled followers of Jesus, we start with where we started today. By remembering we are enough—just as we are. And we always have been beloved and always will be. From the moment we are knit together in our mother’s womb to the eternal moments we return to God’s arms on the other side of the veil.

These verses are first and foremost, an “identity reminder.” They start by telling us who we are and then lay out blueprints for how we are to live in the light of that identity. Further, they come from the apostle Paul—many centuries ago—but they also are the legacy we are given by all the saints who have gone before us—Elvin Frantz and so many before him. I can almost hear Elvin proclaiming Paul’s words to us now.

So then, how *are* we to live? Let’s unpack these a bit and see what springs forth—maybe even bursts forth in song—hopefully a better song than the “warning song” I just sang! As we unpack these tidbits, we might just find a sense of that “calling to which we are called”—where we started today with a question. Who are we called to be as Christians—people of faith—and how are we to conduct our lives faithfully?

A. *DO* Live and Act With Intention in Sacred Time

We are called—by God in countless ways—in this passage and

Her many voices—to live and act with intention. Make the most of the time we have and the opportunity to love and serve God and our neighbor—remembering to care for ourselves too. Tending to our bodies and souls’ need for rest, renewal and restoration.

Elvin’s notes he left us for his memorial wishes included just one quote—from all the meaningful pieces that permeated his life. This one almost gave me chills when I read it yesterday. Why? Because it sounds just like our Ephesians passage for today, and that was chosen weeks ago!

*“Now you see, we are guests here on this planet, visitors who have come for a short time.
So we need to use our days wisely, to make our world a little better for everyone.”*
(p. 161 from “*Lasting Happiness in a Changing World—The BOOK OF JOY—His Holiness the Dalai Lama and Archbishop Desmond Tutu.*)

This is not, to be very clear, a chiding, anxiety-raising prod, like “Look busy! Jesus is coming!” But a call to live in Kairos time—God’s time. Living our days wisely, making the best use of our time is a *holy stance*—an embrace of life and whatever time we are given to walk arm-in-arm with God and one another through our days.

B. Do *NOT* chase after things, pursuits and practices that do not satisfy.

Hint—this is not really about whether you enjoy a glass of wine or beer after a long day! It is about a crucial reminder to live awake and fully—conscious of what we’re doing and saying, and how we are interacting with others for the good of all.

Elvin left other notes around—these ones by his chair and TV. He had watched the news a couple weeks ago before he went into the hospital, and had a page full of questions, notes and clarifications—commentary I’m sure!—on the news of the day.

“Pay really close attention to how to live.”

Pay diligent attention to what is happening all around you. To you and your fellow humans. “Do not be foolish, but understand what the will of the Lord is.” In other words, constantly ask, challenge, clarify—question everything in a constructive way—build up the body; love your neighbor by being involved. Do not just live in a drunken haze of indifference and lethargy; inertia or numbness that leads to not caring because you feel like you can’t make a difference anyway.

You can! If Elvin can still be challenging the “way things are”—working for peace and justice—in his 100th year, from his living room, I think we all can put our excuses to rest and live more awake and involved lives!

C. MAKING MELODY TO THE LORD IN OUR HEARTS

Finally, if we’re not to be foolish—with either our time, our lives, our energies or endeavors—how are we to live? By singing our way through it all!

(From The Message): ¹⁸⁻²⁰ Don’t drink too much wine. That cheapens your life. Drink the Spirit of God, huge drafts of him. Sing hymns instead of drinking songs! Sing songs from your heart to Christ. Sing praises over everything, any excuse for a song to God the Father in the name of our Master, Jesus Christ.

I truly believe, in the depths of my being, that every soul has a song to sing. Even if you can’t carry a tune in a bucket, as they say! Maybe your being just hums to the vibration of the universe more than sings an actual melody (or harmony!), but that is just as vital to the life of the planet and our collective spirit.

What melody do *you* sing, in your heart, to the Lord? What melody do you long to sing, if your voice was freed up to sing—through the smoky air and all the emotions and circumstances that try to block our song—everything that gets in the way? Keeps us from making music with our lives?

We each have a song that wants to break forth from our depths—a song of praise and gratitude; a lament some days—of grief and mourning loss—a psalm of celebration at other holy moments.

We have a song to sing in community. What is the melody that we, together, make to the Lord? Not a “theme song” per se, but a collective chorus that we hum together. What is our vibration, as the young and hip might call it today?

It takes every soul singing a song together—on the same page. That’s a good place to start—a we create a new song for us in this new season. We start by getting on the same page. Then we look at all that is needed—what are those “black dots on the page” of our music? Some are notes, but some are other things as well. Rests, lines, spaces, symbols, rhythms, melody, harmony.

As Paul describes the Body of Christ as a body made of many parts, each part having a vital and necessary role to play, we can get creative and add another metaphor from today’s scripture. The community of Christ is a symphony, or at least a simple hymn, or spiritual song. Picture a page of music that is CUCC. Each of our souls coming to the page, gathering at the Table, pulling up a spot.

Some are beautiful tenor voices—like Warren Montgomery! Peeling out the strength and beauty of the song—whether melody or harmony. Some are sopranos—leading the way, soaring to the heights if needed—helping the rest of us be brave and get up there! Hopefully not strident and warbly! I can say that, being a strong soprano myself!

Some are altos—lower, rich, foundational female voices or children. Often bringing tight harmony just under the melody line.

Basses bring a sure foundation. All you with low voices—doesn’t have to be just men! In our song of life, anyone can

keep us grounded—steady and sure—providing structure and security.

Rests—

Pauses—

Lines—structure. Bylaws committee!! Communication and administration—all so vital to carrying on in community.

Spaces—

Grace notes—

Occasional trills—

Percussion—

Rhythms—make you want to dance! Those with the passion and energy to get us on our feet and moving and grooving! Moving us forward—whether with technology or vision for what can be.

What part of the music is your song? What part of the music that is CUCC, do you resonate most with? Let us make melody together. In our hearts—to find and to keep singing our own souls' song—no matter the ups and downs, the many challenges of life. Let us make melody *together*. Considering that in the Body of Christ in this place, we each have a part to play—whether notes, rhythms, melody, harmony, lines, spaces, structure or trills. No matter our age or longevity—let us live our lives and our faith to the fullest—making the most of the time we are given. Amen.

from Elvin Frantz, March 1, 2007, to All People of Goodwill

The popular hymn, “Amazing Grace,” is more than about private guilt. It also can be thought of as saving us in a public way from the sins of racism and war. The words to this hymn were written by John Newton in England. He was involved in the slave trade, then

became a Christian minister. He worked closely with William Wilberforce and they made slavery illegal in England. I have written additional verses to reflect the work of Newton and Wilberforce in overcoming slavery and our concern today that, with God's help, we can be saved from our wretchedness with war.

Original first verse:

**Amazing grace! how sweet the sound
that saved a wretch like me!
I once was lost, but now am found,
was blind, but now I see.**

New verse regarding slavery:

**When slaves were once like property,
their worth I failed to see.
I once was blind, but now I know
God loves them just like me.**

New verse regarding war:

**When war seemed the road to security
we simply let it be.
But friendship we tried and we will take that route.
Yes, love's what it's all about.**

New concluding verse:

**Amazing grace we need so much
to make all the people free.
We once did wrong, but now we see the way
to save humanity.**