

Ephesians 5:3-20

How Do You Spend Your Time?

If ever there was a scripture passage that would appear to take all the fun out of life, it would be this one! It reminds me of stories that I have heard of very staunch Church of Scotland families that immigrated to Canada and Sundays were “go to church then sit and read books” days. No music, no card playing, no getting out there to ride your bike. Needless to say, there were kids who always managed to find a way to get out and have some fun even if it was under the guise of some other important Christian activity or gathering. Thankfully, that kind of strict upbringing has mostly curtailed, and Christian families see the value in recreational time and gathering together with friends and family.

What one might take away, from what appears to be a lot of rules, is that there are ways that are helpful and healthy in our living and there are things that lead us away from God. Some of the words in this reading can throw us off of the message of the passage. When it says, “But fornication and impurity of any kind, or greed, must not even be mentioned among you, as is proper among saints” one sees the challenges of biblical language that feels old and dated. Basically, we are to keep ourselves from sexual relationships that do not value the intrinsic worth of another and in doing so causes harm. We all know that greed has nothing to do with healthy relationships, and obscene, silly – not silly in the sense of funny, but silly in the sense of foolish - and vulgar talk, can be downright disrespectful.

This may seem prudish in a world of music videos and movies where everything about the body is revealed and watching a comedian who doesn't swear is something that one notices as it is so rare. But the words of wisdom shared are about becoming someone new. A new creation in Christ.

This letter was written to those who were new believers and they had all kinds of behaviours that had been part of their lived experience. Now the writer is saying, you are invited into a new life, and if you are wondering what that means, how this changes you, well, living into a community that shows kindness, respect, and leads to good relationships is part of it.

I remember having a conversation with a friend years ago about how arguments can escalate. I said that though Ken and I have had our share of

disagreements it is a rare occasion when a swear word crosses our mouths in those moments because we respect one another. She nodded as she recalled the number of times she and her partner had argued and things would escalate with layers of swear words punctuating the increasing height of the anger and emotion, ending with doors slammed as one of them walked away. The author of the letter to the Ephesians recognized already then, that words that harm and are meant to make you feel pain do not lead to healthy marriages, friendships, or communities. And I know that I may get push back on this, but even in friendly banter, as soon as strong words are used it just seems to up the anti.

As I speak about this, I realize that I cannot go into detail about every line of this scripture, but I think that it may be worth talking about darkness and light. Here we find advice that one should not associate with people who live in darkness and live as children of light – “for the fruit of the light is found in all that is good and right and true. Take no part in the unfruitful works of darkness, but instead expose them.” (5:9).

What may be most valuable here is to understand that each of us walks in darkness at least some of the time, not one of us gets through life without causing pain somewhere for ourselves and others. Many of us make poor choices and self-medicate with drugs, alcohol, sex, food, or shopping beyond our means. Still this scripture is a call to pay attention to our living – every aspect of it – because when we are living well, treating ourselves and others with respect, dignity, and care, then we are living as people of God and the world truly becomes a better place.

You see how our lives and how we spend our time matters. It matters for us as individuals and it matters as children of God. It matters to community, both church and where we physically live and work. We are called to be careful in how we live, making the most of the time, because the days are evil. The evil is the oppression that people live under. It can be poverty, discrimination, or addiction. Even as recently as this week people were walking the streets in the community of Ft. Frances because of the epidemic of fentanyl overdoses, and we know this is happening across the country. These things are in part what is being talked about in the reading regarding “days of evil.” One does not need to look very far to see the ways climate change is affecting our planet, and how power and money have precedence over the needs of the planet and those who live in fear of war and famine.

And so far, it feels like a pretty big downer of a sermon, but the thing about our faith is that we are never without hope. Hope for change in our lives and

in our communities. Who among us would not want for every person to be able to have housing, be healthy, and find gainful employment? There is work to be done to get us to that place. So one could ask, "How are we spending our time?"

As it was for those earliest Christians, is for us now, we have a new distinctive identity as Christians. Which means how we spend our time matters. How we build others up matters. Learning, listening, asking questions of ourselves, others, and God, helps us to become wise people. The little hymn in the scripture says, "Sleeper, awake! Rise from the dead, and Christ will shine on you." (5:14) It is time for us to wake up to what is going on around us and shed a new light on any darkness. Shine the light of Christ on the issues and problems that we and our world are facing.

Ponder this scripture with thoughtfulness, because though the writer says do not associate with those who deceive and are disobedient, we are still called to live in the world. Our separateness comes in our behaviour, in seeing the world through the lens of God's love and Christ's example. Knowing that the world is not as it should be, be filled with the Holy Spirit. Sing songs that lift your spirit and that of others. Live into the words of those songs that are life-giving, compassionate, and hopeful. Let the songs and the scriptures shape us as community and as individuals. If you don't quite fit into the world's ways, that may not be a bad thing as we give thanks for the ways we see God at work in and through all things and in all people.

We are called to be children of light in a world that has way too much darkness. Darkness in our souls and in our relationships. Darkness is the word used to explain that which is hidden or harmful. Light exposes things, and they become visible, and when we see the harm, as the light of Christ is cast upon the dark things, we can begin to share the healing, restorative, and reconciling love of Christ.

Thanks be to God in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ. Amen!