

Ephesians 5:15-20

Any Excuse for a Song

Some of you know or may recall me telling stories of having sung with a female quartet for many years when I lived in Northern Alberta. Some of my best memories are of the practices that my friends and I had nearly weekly for fourteen years. We loved to perform together and to have people enjoy what we presented and shared. Our love and care for one another, our joy of singing, overflowed to those who came to listen.

Music has always been a part of my life. I started piano lessons when I was still in early elementary school. My aunt was my first piano teacher. I continued taking lessons right up to 2010. I have fumbled with the guitar and came back from Hawaii with a Ukulele. I have done some learning on my own, but signed up for six weeks of Ukulele lessons this fall.

Music has been a big part of the history of St. Andrew's as well, from the choir, to hosting recording artists and local talent. One of the best loved concerts of each year was the Thunder Bay Community Choir's Journey to Advent which took place here for many years coming to an end just this last December.

Even now as part of how we are living into our New Beginnings and partnering in and with community, last fall and right into June we began inviting local musicians and groups to share their music in our worship services. This is going to continue this year as well.

When you think about it, melody, rhythm and beat are part of what surrounds us from the song birds, to radio stations, to the beating of drums or hammers. Even machinery has a rhythm about it. Melody and beat are all around us. So, it may not be so surprising that in Ephesians Paul says to "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."

All this to say that music is a part of us. Even those who would not claim to have any sense of rhythm and beat or those who sing out of tune can appreciate music and what it brings to their lives. Yet, these lines come at the end of our reading today. The reading begins much more somberly with a caution or rather a command to "...watch your step. Use your head. Make the most of every chance you get. These are desperate times!" (15-16).

As is usual, in a sermon I can't take the whole of Ephesians and shed light on it, but it is important to remember that these six verses are a short excerpt from a larger letter. Ephesians is a letter of encouragement, of hope, and of belonging. There are things that

should and must change in our lives if we are to lean and live into the promises held in Ephesians, but it is about us being a work in progress through the work of the Holy Spirit in us. Ephesians is about learning how to live as a beloved child of God.

The fact already is that God loves us. That is a given. Christ is the culmination of the promises of God, promises of love, forgiveness, and grace. What Ephesians hopes to do is encourage us to a different kind of living given the knowledge of God's love for us, the example of Christ in his living, dying, and rising, and the work of the Holy Spirit in us and in everything.

This short passage is a reminder and a warning to live as followers of Christ, as people who believe that there is something bigger than what we see going on in the world. Living as people who understand that God is at work. Because of that, we are called to live in the world, to do what we can to transform the world in our individuals lives and most certainly as a community of faith knowing that these are desperate times. The New Revised Standard Versions of the bible says, "Be careful then how you live, not as unwise people but as wise, making the most of the time, because the days are evil." (v15-16)

It doesn't take much looking around to see how desperate the times are, and we are not to ignore that. In fact, we are to be change makers. We are not to live carelessly, unthinkingly. Eugene Peterson paraphrases the Greek by saying "Make sure you understand what the Master wants."

There is a difference between living out our lives as we please and living out our lives knowing that things are difficult, that life and lives have challenges, that things are desperate, while finding a way to make a difference, not just for ourselves and our loved ones, but for anyone who is seen to be on the margins, vulnerable, and/or powerless.

Having said that, we are not to live as people who feel doomed, but rather we live in the express joy of knowing the love of God, the forgiveness of sins, and seeking the Holy Spirit for guidance. Looking to understand the will of God in our lives. And that will is that we would be image bearers of God. When people see us, interact with us, join with us, observe each of us, there should be some divine sparks that says to them, there is something different here.

There is the line that says, "Don't drink too much wine. That cheapens your life." This applies to anything that cheapens your live. It isn't just about drinking but rather about anything that takes away your value as a child of God, a living breathing human being. We are image bearers who sing. We sing our praises, we sing our love, we sing our laments. We sing praises over everything, anything for an excuse for a song to God.

Bodies respond to music. Our bodies are the original instrument. Using our bodies for singing or enjoying singing is a built-in response to God at work in us. I believe it is an act, a response, that has been dulled over time and could use some work at being revived and appreciated.

As you approach the coming days, remember your call to be an image bearer of God in the world. Someone who pays attention to the need of others, but also someone who notices the music of life, pays attention to the rhythms and beats of the world. It is the work of the church to do so as well.

Then sing. Sing the pain, sing the joy, sing the praise of the world to God. Any excuse for a song. That music can heal, can bring people together, can transform. It is only a part of our expression of living but it is a powerful one. This is not only for those who can keep the beat or sing the melody, it is the response of anyone and everyone who knows God at work in the world. Your living is an excuse for a song to God the Father, in the name of Jesus Christ, and in the power of the Holy Spirit. Amen