

August 19, 2012

Twelfth Sunday after Pentecost

**Live Wisely: Be Filled with the Spirit**

**Ephesians 5:15-20**

Jesus spirituality is messy, is earthy because life is earthy and messy.

Being a disciple of Jesus is all about participating with God in the day to dayness of life

This is what Paul addresses when he encourages us to live wisely and be filled with the Spirit.

Last week as I was taking a morning walk, I was reflecting upon the earthiness of life (family reunions have a way of bringing that out . . .)

– and I came to realize again that real spirituality is not a spirituality that escapes this life, or is reserved for the high times, times when we get away from it all, but is meant to be lived in the midst of life – the earthiness and messiness of life.

Real spirituality embraces all of life.

Not just the messiness of family, but the brokenness of life – with shootings, violence . . .

Embracing an earthy spirituality and discipleship is what being incarnational means.

To be incarnational is to embrace life in the midst of all the messiness and brokenness.

God, in Christ, did not come to us on a Broadway stage with spotlights, or to star in some “reality show,”

But, Jesus came embracing our humanity in all its earthiness and messiness, in all its brokenness – embracing all that makes life too real.

And in the midst of the ordinariness of our humanity, the earthiness, messiness and brokenness of our humanity, Jesus reveals **the depths of God’s love for us and God’s desire for our shalom.**

Our receiving God’s love, responding to God’s love draws us into living a real spirituality, a Jesus spirituality and enables us to not run from these realities of life – but to live for God in the midst of them.

Paul, in our text declares, “Be very careful, then how you live – not as unwise, but as wise”

This is not merely practical hints for living in light of a Christ-centered spirituality.

This is the context, the crux, the heart of the matter in which we live out our spirituality.

Jesus-centered spirituality is incarnational – concerned about the real stuff of daily life.

Peterson in *The Message*, expresses Paul’s words in this way: “So watch your step. Use your head. Make the most of every chance you get. These are desperate times!”

How do we live spiritually, live wisely when we live in earthy, messy desperate times?

How do we go about being people of character, being a community of character, being a community of wholeness and shalom, when it seems God’s ways are not making much headway – even in our own lives? Paul names it for what it is – he says “the days are evil.”

With all that is going on in our world – not just news of shootings, news of ongoing war and famine, oppression, poverty, hatred, people set against other people, but also the stuff that trips us up in life – it seems Paul has a point.

And so, rather than expressing a faith that escapes such realities, we are encouraged to embrace the messiness that encompasses our lives.

So how are we to live in desperate times, in our times, when the days are evil?

Paul gives us a list of ways, culminating with one that holds them all together.

He says “be very careful, how you live”

He says “be wise, not unwise”

He says “don’t be foolish, but understand God’s will”

He says “don’t get drunk on wine, instead be filled with the Spirit”

### 1. “Be very careful, how you live”

**Be careful does not mean to be cautious** – we often equate the two.

Climbing mountains, canoeing or kayaking through rapids, skydiving – nothing cautious about such activities, but those who excel in these are indeed careful – taking the necessary steps to develop the right skills, have the right equipment, not being foolish with their lives, so that such high-risk activities may not cause harm, injury or even death due their being reckless.

Being wise is being careful, being unwise is being reckless

So to live as ones who are wise in these desperate times – requires us **not to be cautiously careful**, but **courageously careful** in order to live radically different as a new humanity.

To be courageously careful is to live intentionally, live in light of God’s ways, God’s Story, to live full of God’s Spirit.

### 2. “Be wise, not unwise”

To live being wise is to live in a way that “anticipates the likely consequences of an action, and . . . act . . . to avoid what will bring trouble” (Mitton, *Ephesians*, 187).

Wisdom, Solomon tells us, begins with being in awe of God, worshiping God (Proverbs 1:7).

Worship is not just an action we do, it is the context in which we are shaped to be a people filled with the wisdom of God’s Spirit.

Worship is a time in which we give ourselves to God – it is also a time when, in our openness to God, we receive from God.

### 3. “Do not be foolish. Know God’s ways”

Likewise, Paul encourages us not to be foolish – **fools** according to Solomon, “despise wisdom and instruction”

But to understand God’s ways

Give way to the Spirit of God who leads us into living out God’s purposes.

**And then, Paul sums up these encouragements with: “Do not get drunk on wine, instead be filled with the Spirit.”**

I want to take some time to unpack this!

**This correlation, juxtaposition is interesting – alcohol, spirits and God’s Spirit.**

Both set us free from our inhibitions, Both set us free from being cautious, Both give us boldness in the way we act.

Jesus made this connection in the Gospels alluding to the Spirit when he talked about the new wine being poured into old wineskins – new wine needs new wineskins because the old will burst (cf. Matthew 9:17; Mark 2: 22; Luke 5:37).

On the day of Pentecost, the 120 who were filled with the Holy Spirit and spoke the word of God in ways that was understandable to all who were gathered there from different nations – were accused of being drunk at 9 am.

Peter responds saying that they are not drunk, as the crowds supposed, but rather the Spirit has been poured out on them in accordance to what the prophet Joel declared (cf. Joel 2:28-32).

One translator even suggests that Peter expressed: “We are drunk, but not as you suppose.”

The one kind of imbibing of spirits leads to debauchery – in which shameful things are done, leading to deeper brokenness, living in ways that do not make God’s reign visible, actions contrary to God’s ways.

But being filled, drunk with the Spirit – is to live wisely amid a world struggling with evil  
– being filled with God’s Spirit makes God’s reign visible in us and through us  
– it is fruit, by-product of living open to God’s Spirit.

Now, rather than charging into a diatribe on the evils of drinking wine

What Paul advocates is – that we drink and keep on drinking  
– of the Spirit of God.

Be filled with the Spirit, get drunk on the Spirit, be under the influence of the Spirit  
– live and walk by the Spirit of God!

This Spirit is God’s Spirit, God’s Spirit who leads us into the knowledge and wisdom of God, in understanding and living in God’s will, God’s ways, in being wise, rather than foolish.

Giving ourselves to God’s Spirit is a daily practice we can engage in as simply as if we were to uncork a bottle of wine

– being Spirit filled is a calling to carry a corkscrew around with us.

As we encounter each new day we give attention to being careful as to how we live, as ones who are filled with the wisdom of God.

With such a focus, we open ourselves to God in prayer and ask God to fill us, to pour out God's Spirit into our lives.

We may even want to take on a posture of receiving – opening up our arms to receive from God, God's Spirit poured out into us

– more and more

– until we live more and more under the influence of the Holy Spirit.

And rather than our senses and movements being dulled, as wine eventually does,

**We are attuned more acutely to God, attuned more acutely to whom and what God notices and what God is doing, how God sees others, how God engages others**

– and the Spirit encourages us

– not to be cautious, but to be bold, courageous, and careful as we live out the ways of God in contrast to the ways of the world.

We live as ones from whom living water emanates (John 7:38),

We live as ones who sing a new song, with a new melody in a world singing the same old songs

– singing and making music from our hearts to the Lord, always living in an attitude of thanksgiving to God

– declaring the new life, the new rhythms of being human in the ways of God

– ways which bring about peace, rather than violence, ways which bring about reconciliation and community, rather than racism and hatred.

**So, my encouragement to you today is to drink!**

Be filled with the Spirit, imbibe the Spirit

Never stop drinking in the Spirit,

Get drunk on the Spirit,

Live and act under the influence of the Spirit

– in this way we find a way to live with hope and joy in the midst of the messiness and brokenness of life

– in ways that make visible God's reign

– the newness of life through Christ Jesus

– which sets people free.

**This is real spirituality**

– **real discipleship**

– that is not fearful, but embraces the life of Jesus in the midst of the earthiness and messiness of life.