

WHAT THE LORD WANTS IS WRITTEN CLEARLY AND PLAINLY FOR US IN THE SCRIPTURES

Sermon for the 11th Sunday after Pentecost, 2018

Ephesians 5:15-20

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all. Amen.

The text for our sermon today is part of our Second Reading from before, Ephesians 5:15-20: ¹⁵ **Therefore, be very careful how you live! Do not live as unwise people but as wise people!** ¹⁶ **Make the most of every opportunity! For the days are evil.** ¹⁷ **Therefore, do not be foolish but understand what the Lord wants!** ¹⁸ **Do not get drunk on wine, which leads to wild living! Instead, be filled with the Spirit!** ¹⁹ **Speak to one another with psalms, hymns and spiritual songs and sing and make music in your hearts to the Lord!** ²⁰ **Always give thanks to God the Father for everything in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ!** ²¹ **Be subordinate to one another out of respect for Christ!**

Lord God, heavenly Father, sanctify us through Your truth, Your Word is truth. Amen.

Dear friends in Christ,

We most certainly are living in the last times. Looking all around us we see wickedness and a complete disregard for God and our fellowmen. We, along with the whole of creation, groan¹ as we await that great day when it will all end, when Jesus comes again.

Although wickedness is common in the world today, it comes of no surprise to see that it really was no different at the time of the apostle Paul. He himself had written **the days are evil**; evil in the State and evil in the Church - and he was right. The Roman government at that time was steadily but surely heading toward its dissolution and ruin. The qualities which had been the glory and the pride of the citizens of Rome were rapidly yielding to the lives of luxury, debauchery, and lewdness. All around there were uprisings, rebellion, and insurrection, while at that time also there was pestilence and famine. Truly, social conditions for the Roman government were evil.

Fast forward some 2000 years. Our own country was founded on right morals and beliefs, and it would probably be right to say that we are still 'the lucky country' compared to many other places overseas. However, we cannot fail to see that both government and society are now not what they used to be. All sorts of crime have increased within the last few years, and the certainty of punishment has diminished! Wickedness is all around. Today, we find ourselves living in an age where such things as homosexuality is regarded as nothing out of the ordinary, where this lifestyle is defended with much gusto, and where two homosexuals, in the eyes of the state, can be lawfully married. Take a look at abortion, and the terrible laws soon to be debated in our state parliament which will make it legal to have an abortion for any reason up to 22 weeks gestation. It seems as though our unborn children are treated as a disease that can be easily cured. These, and many other terrible things, make the world we live in quite wicked.

The Church too, is not spared from man's wickedness. At the time of Paul, heathenism and Christianity were locked in a struggle for life and death. Persecutions were rife and followed wherever followers of Christ were stationed. Paul himself, when he wrote his Letter to the Ephesians, was lying in a prison under strong military guard. He was well aware that false teachings and wrong practises had crept into the churches. In a word, the days were evil, and remember, we are talking about conditions some years ago. Really, nothing has changed today. As called children of God, we are living in a critical time, and so we must be **careful how (we) live**, and to **make the most of every opportunity! For the days are evil**. We must **not be foolish but understand what the Lord wants**, namely, that what the Lord wants is written clearly and plainly for us in the Scriptures. We must not be like those who will openly profess that they believe yet are quite ignorant when it comes to giving a satisfactory account of what they actually believe. For such people, there is usually a lack of Christian conviction, or strength and belief. What was once accepted as God's truth is now called into question. *"Whatever you do,"* they tell us, *"don't emphasise creeds and doctrine; it is not creeds we want, but deeds; it is not doctrine that saves, Jesus saves."* As if anyone could be saved by Jesus without the right doctrine concerning Him, His person and His work! Quite often the Catechism is thrown aside and denounced. Why do we need to instruct the children? Why bother the youth with doctrines of theology? Why bother with the rite of confirmation? Why is so much made of the Bible? Don't some of the most learned of clergymen put different interpretations upon texts? Haven't men full of knowledge pointed out that it is full of discrepancies?

¹ Romans 8:22-23

So it is that we see how much danger there is in the Church. Clever men speak and write in magazines, sermons, essays, lectures and so forth, and in what they say, multitudes become unsettled in their faith. There is even a danger that those who regularly sit under the pulpit in the congregation where the fundamental truths of the Christian faith are constantly stressed, will be caught in this trend and carried away by this current of thought. We have proof of this when we see that there are those who after all instruction and warning, stand up and speak favourably - even entering into joint fellowship - with those churches who openly deny simple doctrines spelled out clearly in God's Word. Some of those religions don't have a clue what the real teaching of justification is, what God's Word says about women preachers or homosexual couples, what the Lord's Supper and Baptism is all about, and how the Bible is inspired. These people live as it were, in a kind of fog or mist. They see nothing and believe nothing clearly. Carried away by false ideas, they seem to think that everybody is right, and nobody is wrong, and they even fault those who make a definite declaration of faith.

Coming even closer to home, the whole opinion of what constitutes practical Christianity seems to be lowered. You see scores of church people continually doing things which in days gone by were thought to be utterly immoral. What's gone wrong? Where is the courtesy, the sincerity, the firmness which marked so many of the godly men and women of the past and passing generations? We have inherited their principles, but to what extent have we inherited their Christian virtues and practise what they did?

If we say that we are true and sincere Christians, then we need to adhere unflinchingly to the teachings of the Bible. Paul says: **Do not live as unwise people but as wise... understand what the Lord wants**. As was mentioned earlier, what the Lord wants is written clearly and plainly for us in the Scriptures. If we want to be wise, then let us throw aside all indecision and take up the true doctrinal religion of Christ.

Understand what the will of the Lord is. His will is our salvation. He has bought us back at the price of His own blood and death on the cross. He has redeemed and rescued us from sin, not freed us to further sin and corruption. He has freed us to serve Him, not to serve the lusts of our own flesh. Paul contrasts the two situations by saying ¹⁸ **Do not get drunk on wine, which leads to wild living! Instead, be filled with the Spirit!** By using the word "instead," Paul joins two somewhat parallel lines of thought. He says not to misuse alcohol to give yourself a bogus kind of lift, a temporary sort of high that leads to all kinds of bad things. "Instead" be filled with the real Spirit to guide you in wholesome activity that brings lasting benefit to you and others.

Throughout history, wherever Christianity has been victorious, it has been because men have been told the plain truth of Christ's death and sacrifice on the cross, by preaching ruin by sin, redemption by Christ crucified, and regeneration by the Holy Spirit. This, and only this, is the teaching which God has honoured with success. Let the clever advocates of a broad creed, weak creeds, and no creeds at all, do as they please. As for us, let us hold fast to such ancient Scriptural doctrines as the Trinity, the inspiration of the Bible, the necessity and efficacy of prayer, the existence of the devil, and the reality of a future with God, or everlasting punishment. In so doing, we will be wise; wise for ourselves, wise for others, wise for the Church of the pure Word and Confessions, and wise for the cause of Christ in the world.

Therefore be very careful how you live. While everything is going well down the path of life, we need to be careful, but not so careful as when our path becomes rough and uneasy. It is then that we need to be more cautious of how we walk. Such are the days into which our lot has fallen. Living in a society where true faith is being tampered with, where all morality is loosening, and the true qualities of practical Christianity are falling by the wayside, we surely have much reason for keeping wide awake, for watching our footsteps, lest our hearts be deceived, and we turn aside from the good and narrow path. We need to heed the warning given to us by Paul: **Do not live as unwise people, but as wise**.

Dear friends, if we want to be wise, then we will strive to follow God's holy Commandments. We will not let the wise words of the Almighty disappear from our lives. For so many people, their paths have become overgrown with weeds.

The will of the Lord is revealed in His Book, and it is in here that you will find that it contains directions concerning your tongues and your tempers, your dress, your behaviour in business and private life, your conduct and so forth. All these are treated so that there is no excuse to **live as unwise people**.

But here is the great drawback. People do not desire to know what the will of the Lord is. Ignorance of the Bible is not only the root of all error, accounting for the falling away of some of the wildest of fanaticisms, but it is also the root of all unholiness of life. If people would only be more at home in their Bibles, if they would take just a little more time to attend to private religion, how much better they would be in faith and in morals! And it is God's will that it should be so.

Finally then, **be filled with the Spirit. Speak to one another with psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs, and sing and make music in your hearts to the Lord. Always give thanks to God the Father for everything in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ**. All these things are required if we are to stand in this evil day. We must have a deep and pervading fear

of God, a holy dread of inviting His displeasure, a proper regard for His authority. That will prove a mighty preventive against evil and a mighty incentive to do that which is good.

May that fear of God be instilled deeply into our hearts! May we, as understanding men and women, discern the times and unflinchingly and fearlessly abide in doctrine and practise with what is the will of the Lord. Therein lies our safety and our salvation. Amen.

The peace of God, which passes all understanding, keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.

PRAYER FOR THE THIRTEENTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

O Lord, we thank You for all Your goodness to us, but especially for the gift of Your Word and for the knowledge that we have of You through its message. We thank You for teaching us Your commandments, but, far more, we thank You for showing Yourself and Your limitless grace to us in Jesus Christ Your Son. Enable us to listen to Him in faith and to obey Him in love.

Send forth Your Word into our world today. Open doors of opportunity for us, and equip us to be active witnesses to Your Gospel, so that more and more may come to know Jesus Christ. Sow Your Word in the hearts and minds of people everywhere. Change their blindness to sight. Change their enslavement to sin, Satan, and death into the freedom that Christ alone gives.

Heavenly Father, let Your Word, as a living power, judge the thoughts and desires of our hearts. Increase our knowledge of what is good, and strengthen us to examine ourselves, amend our lives, and give up our pet sins. Grant that, through feeding on Jesus, the Son of Man, we may remain in Him, and He in us, and that, remaining in Him, we may be guided by His Word, and bring forth abundant fruit.

Let Your Word shine in our homes, that parents and children may live together in love, serve one another in kindness, and experience true joy, both in this life and the one to come.

Give the Spirit of Christ to all who are facing sickness, sorrow, hardship or need. Grant that they may find You quick to strengthen and bless them, and lead them to praise You for doing everything well.

Look with compassion on Your creation, and send drought breaking rain to water and revive the earth.

Continue to keep us by the power of Your Holy Spirit; comfort us by Your Gospel, and sustain us by Your love.

This we pray in the name of Jesus, who gave Himself for us, that we might live through Him, and praise You for ever and ever. Amen.

13th Sunday after Pentecost

Proverbs 9:1-10

¹ Wisdom has built her house. She has cut out her seven pillars. ² She has slaughtered her animals. She has mixed her wine. She has also set her table. ³ She has sent out her servant girls. She is calling out on the highest place in the city: ⁴ “Anyone who is gullible should turn in here!” She has been telling the one who lacks sense: ⁵ “Come, people, eat my bread and drink the wine that I have mixed! ⁶ Forsake gullible people and live! Walk straight on the road of understanding!”

⁷ A person who corrects a mocker gets an insult, and a person who rebukes a wicked person incurs abuse.

⁸ Do not correct a mocker, that he may not hate you! Correct a wise person, that he may love you!

⁹ Give instruction to a wise person that he may become still wiser! Teach a righteous person that he may increase in insight!

¹⁰ The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom, and the knowledge of the Holy One is understanding.

Ephesians 5:6-21

⁶ Do not let anyone deceive you with empty words! For because of these sins God’s anger comes on disobedient people. ⁷ Therefore, do not be partners with them! ⁸ For once you were darkness but now you are light in the Lord. Live as people who belong to the light! ⁹ For light produces everything that is good, righteous and true. ¹⁰ Approve what is pleasing to the Lord! ¹¹ Do not have anything to do with the works of darkness, from which no good can come, but instead continue to expose them! ¹² For it is a shame even to mention the things that they do in secret. ¹³ All things that are exposed are made visible by the light. ¹⁴ For everything that is revealed is light. For this reason, it is said: “Wake up, you who sleep! Rise from the dead, and Christ will shine on you!” ¹⁵ Therefore, be very careful how you live! Do not live as unwise people but as wise people! ¹⁶ Make the most of every opportunity! For the days are evil. ¹⁷ Therefore, do not be foolish but understand what the Lord wants! ¹⁸ Do not get drunk on wine, which leads to wild living! Instead, be filled with the Spirit! ¹⁹ Speak to one another with psalms, hymns and spiritual songs and sing and make music in your hearts to the Lord! ²⁰ Always give thanks

to God the Father for everything in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ!²¹ Be subordinate to one another out of respect for Christ!

John 6:51-69

⁵¹ I am the living Bread that has come down from heaven. If anyone eats of this Bread, he will live for ever, and the Bread that I shall give is My flesh, for the life of the world.”

⁵² Therefore, the Jews kept arguing sharply with one another: “How can this Man give us His flesh to eat?”

⁵³ Therefore, Jesus told them, “Truly, truly, I tell you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink His blood, you have no life in you. ⁵⁴ He who eats My flesh and drinks My blood has eternal life, and I shall raise him up on the last day. ⁵⁵ For My flesh is true food, and My blood is true drink. ⁵⁶ He who eats My flesh and drinks My blood remains in Me, and I in him. ⁵⁷ As the living Father has sent Me, and as I live because of the Father, so that person who feeds on Me will also live because of Me. ⁵⁸ This is the Bread that has come down from heaven. It is not like the bread that the fathers ate, they died. He who eats this Bread will live for ever.”

⁵⁹ He said these things in the synagogue, while He was teaching at Capernaum. ⁶⁰ Therefore, when they heard this, many of His disciples said, “This is a hard statement. Who can listen to it?”

⁶¹ Since Jesus knew in Himself that His disciples were grumbling about this, He asked them, “Does this offend you? ⁶² Then what if you see the Son of Man go up to where He was before? ⁶³ The Spirit is the One who gives life. The sinful human nature is of no help at all. The Words that I have spoken to you are spirit and are life. ⁶⁴ However, there are some of you who do not believe.”

For Jesus knew from the beginning who those were who did not believe and the one who would betray Him. ⁶⁵ He went on to say, “That is why I have told you that no one can come to Me unless it has been given to him by My Father.”

⁶⁶ After this, many of His disciples went back and did not walk with Him any longer. ⁶⁷ Therefore, Jesus asked the Twelve, “Surely you too do not want to go away?”

⁶⁸ Simon Peter answered Him, “Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the Words of eternal life. ⁶⁹ We have come to believe and know that You are the Holy One of God.”

