

Ephesians 5:15-20

Some of you may know that my wife Anna is 8 months pregnant. It would be an extreme understatement to say we are excited and nervous about this new addition to our family. God willing, everything will go fine and we will also welcome a new addition into God's family through the Sacrament of Holy Baptism. During one of my Every Member Visits (which I am still trying to make, so feel free to sign up for a time!) an experienced father told me, "Make the most of the time when they're young, because they grow up so quickly! One day you're raising an infant and the next you're sending them off to college." After I left that house, I started thinking to myself, "How will I make the most of my time? What things can I do? Life is busy already, and the excitement is just beginning. Am I ready for this?" These are some questions which the apostle Paul answers in our lesson for today. But Paul isn't limiting our thoughts to the time we spend with our kids. His message applies whether you have kids or not. He's talking about our whole lives. How we teach the kids of our congregation is an important part of our lives because God has entrusted them to us! Paul tells you and me: "**Make the Most of Your Time!**" He gives us two ways to make the most of our time: **1. By understanding the Lord's will for our souls**, and **2. By trusting the Spirit to accomplish our goals.**

1. Understanding the Lord's Will for our souls.

The Ephesians received one of the greatest Christian educations in the history of the world. The great missionary and teacher, Paul, had lived with them and taught them for over three years. On Paul's third missionary journey he had spent this extended time in Ephesus, so that he could build up the believers and make more disciples of Jesus. Three years is a long time for Paul, especially if we realize he never spent more than two years anywhere else. The book of Acts tells us Paul had discussions daily in the lecture hall of Tyrannus.

What do you think Paul taught the Ephesians for those three years? Paul himself told the Ephesians, "I have not hesitated to proclaim to you the *whole will of God*" (Acts 20:27). Paul taught God's will to everyone he met. Here in Ephesians 5 Paul wrote, "Do not be foolish, but understand what the Lord's will is." The major component for Christian living and our Christian education is this, **Understanding the Lord's will for our souls.**

But what is the Lord's will for our souls? When we talk about the will of God, we are really talking about what God wants. What God wants for us as his children is simple. Paul said, "Be very careful, then, how you live—not as unwise but as wise." Live wisely. God demands lives of wisdom from you and me. Wisdom is the practical aptitude for living. From God's Word, wisdom teaches not only what to do, but also when to do it. Wisdom means we show love to our spouse, not when we are done arguing—but right when we feel like fighting. Wisdom means we treat our boss with love and respect, especially when he's a horrible boss. We don't gloat when our enemy falters or rejoice when someone we don't get along with loses their job.

When God says, "Be wise! Be perfect!" we know that we are not wise. Too often we are completely unwise and foolish. We actually have a way of twisting reality, don't we? We look at different situations in our lives and we manipulate God's wisdom to fit our foolishness. Because the days are evil, we are tempted to be evil right along with them. Our neighbor "had it coming"; my boss doesn't deserve my respect; my friend didn't help me, so why should I help them? Man's wisdom is foolishness. God's will shows us our own sins.

But that's not the end of God's will. God doesn't just give us a set of rules and forget about us, like some lonely child in the back of class. God has another part to his will. It focuses on one person, who interestingly enough, is called the Wisdom of God. Wisdom was born in a stable on that first Christmas over 2,000 years ago. The cattle were mooing and the angels were singing and Wisdom took on human flesh. This is what God wanted. He wanted to send his Son, Jesus the Christ, and in his wisdom he did. God's will shows us our Savior. **By understanding the Lord's will for our souls**, we testify with Paul: "God our Savior...wants all men to be saved and to come to a knowledge of the truth." (1 Timothy 2:3b-4). God's will is that all people be saved from the power and guilt of sin. He carried out this will when he sent Jesus to be our Savior. This is the truth which takes away our foolish acts. This is the truth which forgets our unwise living.

Then what is God's will for your soul? To believe in the One he has sent and to have eternal life in him. Whoever eats the Bread of Life and believes in him will never die. Death was not God's will for us—eternal life is God's will for us and our children. God's will is that we see our place in his plan of salvation and the place he has in heaven for us.

God's wisdom in Christ gives us open minds. We teach our children to have open minds here at First German. They are open to ideas and learning from all subjects and disciplines. But you have an open mind, not so that anything goes—as most people think. You have an open mind for the same reason you have an open mouth: so that you can close it on something solid. That's what our children do every day as they study the Word of God.

They close their minds on Christ and focus on him. Christian education, no matter what your age, means chewing on the Bread of Life and digesting the meaning of his truth. **Make the most of your time** and grow in the knowledge of him! God our Savior has rescued us from the foolishness of our own thinking and he gives us an education in his will—Law and Gospel.

2. By trusting the Spirit to accomplish our goals.

This year we are beginning the 154th year of our Lutheran elementary school. By God's grace, we have a new principal who literally travelled thousands of miles to join us. The work of our school has really not changed much over the years. We have always had the same will of God to pass on to the next generation. We have taught the kids what God wants us to do and, more importantly, what God has done for us in Christ Jesus. Christian education is more than just learning facts and Bible stories. It is learning for life, learning to serve, learning to be full-time witnesses for Christ. Paul gives us a list of goals in our lesson from Ephesians. How will we carry these goals out? What can we do to make the most of our time? **We trust the Spirit to accomplish our goals.**

St. Paul wrote, "Do not get drunk on wine, which leads to debauchery. Instead, be filled with the Spirit. Speak to one another with psalms, hymns and spiritual songs. Sing and make music in your heart to the Lord, always giving thanks to God the Father for everything, in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ." Paul gives us six different encouragements and goals in this section. He wants us to not get drunk, to be filled with the Spirit, to speak to one another, to sing, to make music in our hearts, and to give thanks. I think we could boil all these goals down into one simple phrase: "Don't be filled with spirits, but be filled with the Holy Spirit."

At first glance, you might think to yourself, "Why does Paul single out drunkenness? Is getting drunk any worse than murder or adultery or false testimony?" No, it isn't. But the sin of drunkenness does sum up the darkness we left behind. We once lived completely in that darkness. It made us foolish and drunk on our own ideas about life. But Christ came and saved us from the darkness. When I think of darkness, I remember Good Friday when it was dark from the sixth hour until the ninth hour. For three hours darkness covered the land, and for three hours Christ suffered the pain of hell itself. It took darkness to break our drunkenness. So, Paul says, "Don't get drunk, don't be filled with spirits! Be filled with the Holy Spirit!"

But how am I filled with the Spirit? Can you tell a glass: "Be filled with juice"? Or can you tell a school building: "Be filled with students"? No, someone needs to fill the glass and someone needs to bring the children to Jesus. So, when Paul tells us to be filled with the Spirit, we ask: how am I filled with the Spirit?

A Chinese man from a remote village had the opportunity to visit one of the new modern cities for the first time. He could not bring much home with him and he had little money to buy presents. But he was amazed at the electric lights which he saw everywhere. So he brought back a sack full of light bulbs and a couple of light switches for the village. When he returned he hung the bulbs in front of his home and on his neighbors' trees. Everyone watched with curiosity and asked him what he was doing. He just smiled and said, "Wait until dark, you'll see." When night came he turned on the switches, but nothing happened. No one had told him about electricity. He didn't know the light bulbs were useless unless connected to the source of their power. You and I are the Spirit's light bulbs. He enlightens our lives with the Word. The Word is the electricity through which the Spirit works. **Trust the Spirit to accomplish our goals!** And we have a lot of goals, don't we? We want our children to know Christ and to live wisely. We want our school to continue as the gospel ministry it truly is. We want parents and teachers to partner in teaching Jesus' sheep. These are high goals and they are not just ours. The Spirit wants these things too. He wants the Word on our lips and in our hearts!

That's where the other encouragements come in. Speak to one another about God's Word. Talk about psalms and hymns and Scripture readings. We are filled by God's Word and the Spirit works through that Word. Ask yourself, When was the last time we talked about Jesus as a family? Have I ever asked someone "what did you take from the sermon today"? Or have you said, "I got some good insights from CPO this morning. Let me tell you about them..." **Make the most of your time!** Share the word and in this way you will be filled with the Holy Spirit. God fills us through the Word about Christ. When he puts his Word in our hearts, the Spirit is at work in our hearts. As we come to the Savior, trust our God to work through the Word. It's a blessing to operate a Christian school and to support gospel ministry with all our hearts. Let's make the most of our time of grace. AMEN.