

Pastor T.C. Arnold
20th Sunday after Trinity
Ephesians 5:15-20
October 14th, 2018

An engine mechanic forgets to put antifreeze into the brand new engine he just installed. It overheats and ruins the engine. This little mistake costs thousands of dollars. A family member who pays the bills forgets about one of them and a “late notice” is delivered with a penalty fee for late payment. A husband completely forgets about his wedding anniversary and gets an earful and the end of the day from his wife. He ends up on the couch for the night.

Forgetting can be costly. In God’s design for life, he sends his Spirit to keep us from forgetting that Christ is the beginning and end—the source and center and goal of our life. The Spirit is sent to remind us of all that Jesus said and did. The Spirit teaches us not to be foolish, but to be wise in our walk through life. Paul describes the means by which the Spirit works, so that we may live a life filled and fueled by the Spirit.

There is no doubt that we live in wicked times. We don’t have to look too far to see this is quite true. We know of war and we know of dispute. We see the controversy and backbiting even within our own government. We know of hate and we know of rage. In days like today we find ourselves on guard more than ever... especially for our kids. We have to monitor what they watch on television or are pulling up on the computer. Not only for our kids but for all of us as well. There is so much access to that which can harm us or compromise our relationship with God – we have to be on guard.

For that reason, Paul says in the text from Ephesians chapter 5, “*don’t be unwise but be wise instead.*” Don’t give yourself over to drunkenness – but rather, “make the most of every opportunity.” Every opportunity? To do what? Make the most of every opportunity to allow God to fill you and fill others through you. “*Be filled with the Holy Spirit,*” says the Lord. Do not be filled with anything that might get in the way of God filling you up. The world is filled with people who could say, “Today I made God laugh out loud – I told him everything I know.” God knows more than you. Wisdom comes from God, not from you. True wisdom fills us with the Holy Spirit and not anything else that would get in His way.

Still, at times we think we know – we got everything all figured out. Then, something happens and we realize how much we don’t know – how “unwise” we actually are. Years ago there was a massive landslide that occurred in Aberfan, Wales, in which 144 people died, 116 of whom were children in a schoolhouse. At the funeral the people sang in Welsh, “Jesus, Lover of My Soul.” People asked how God could let such a thing happen, but they were all people from out-of-town. The people of Aberfan made use of the opportunity to open their homes to the visitors and feed the volunteers, giving more comfort than they received. A miner who lost his only son in the disaster put into words what all the people of Aberfan knew: “Far from sending grief to Aberfan, God grieves with us. After all, once His only Son died, too.”

This is wisdom... knowing that God is with us and not against us. He even gives us the strength to give of ourselves when times are difficult. It’s Stewardship Sunday... and we have a God who is with us when we pledge to do His good work for others with our time, talent and our treasure. God gives us more than just wisdom in our troubles, He gives Himself. He gave us His only begotten Son to die so that we might be filled and fueled by the Holy Spirit. That is done in no better way than right here in this place today. We stand shoulder to shoulder with our brothers and sisters in Christ in Christian worship. In and through that you are filled. You are filled with the Spirit as the spirit words through the Psalms that are spoken, and the hymns that are sung –

through the canticles and the chants. These are words that you know and have become familiar with. That's no accident as now you can take them with you throughout your week – thinking about God's Words and even sharing them.

The Spirit that has filled us and fuels us works through means. He operates through all its forms – spoken, read, treasured by memory in the heart. Not just set to music but that sometimes is the way that we remember the words. I will never forget being in the garden outside with my grandmother – or – inside in her kitchen and listening to her hum the liturgy that we sing at worship all the time. Those were words that she not only repeated in her head but also by which she lived her life. Every day was a day in God's Word remembered through the way that she worshiped. It became a part of her – a part of her daily living.

We can say the same thing through what we were blessed to see and hear in this place – the baptism of our children, the absolution spoken to us, the hearing of the Gospel words, and the body and blood of Jesus all for you.

And every time we go to the Lord's Supper together bound in faith -- we know that the Lord comes to us again – in, with, and under that bread and wine. We receive the body and blood of Christ, given and shed for the forgiveness of our sins. And the more we gather around Word and Sacrament, the more opportunities the Spirit has to drive out our natural foolishness and make us wise to salvation. In Christ we are no longer the “unwise.” In Christ we are “wise” to life.

It is in this wisdom unto salvation that Paul says in verse 20, “*always give thanks to God the Father for everything...*” We have everything in Christ – therefore for every gift which we do have there is the opportunity to give thanks. The hymn, “Now Thank We All Our God” was written by Martin Rinckart, who was born in Eilenburg, Germany, in April 1586, forty years after Martin Luther's death. His hymn has been called the German *Te Deum* and is considered by many as second only among German hymns to the Reformer's magnificent “A Mighty Fortress Is Our God.” Rinckart was minister of the Gospel in Eilenburg during the terrible Thirty Years' War. Eilenburg was a walled town and therefore a place of refuge for thousands who had lost everything in the war. The overcrowded condition of the city brought on famine and pestilence. At times Rinckart was the only pastor in the city. To serve thousands suffering from hunger and dying from disease was a Herculean task. Often he read the burial service for from forty to fifty persons a day. At last the number of dead each day was so great that it became impossible to bury them singly, and they were interred in groups in trenches.

Altogether, 8,000 people died in Eilenburg during this time – including his own wife. At the same time Rinckart suffered several financial losses and failed to receive the proper consideration at the hands of the authorities of the city in spite of his unselfish and tireless efforts in behalf of the sick and the dying. And yet he wrote during this time that wonderful hymn of praise and thanksgiving to the Lord. I think this really puts things into perspective for us – when we are thankful. We like to be thankful when something goes well or we benefit somehow. Can we be thankful in the midst of suffering like Rinckart? That's indeed a difficult thing to do.

We thank God conditions aren't so bad for us. For that we are thankful. But when tragedy does strike or heartbreak sets in we still have that which makes us wise unto salvation. We have Christ – the same Christ who would die for us. We have a God who knows what we have suffered and suffers alongside of us. We have the Gospel that gives us the opportunity to rejoice over everything that doesn't seem right. Because for us, we can give thanks that the Holy Spirit gives us more than we could imagine. We have life fueled and filled by the Holy Spirit – which means we have more. We have forgiveness and we have heaven. Amen.

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