

## **"Giving Thanks"**

August 15, 2021

### Ephesians 5: 15-20

*<sup>15</sup> Be careful then how you live, not as unwise people but as wise, <sup>16</sup> making the most of the time, because the days are evil. <sup>17</sup> So do not be foolish but understand what the will of the Lord is. <sup>18</sup> Do not get drunk with wine, for that is debauchery; but be filled with the Spirit, <sup>19</sup> as you sing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs among yourselves, singing and making melody to the Lord in your hearts, <sup>20</sup> giving thanks to God the Father at all times and for everything in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.*

[Video: Thanksgiving Chair] – *after Kids Message*



When have you recently sat in the "thanksgiving chair"?

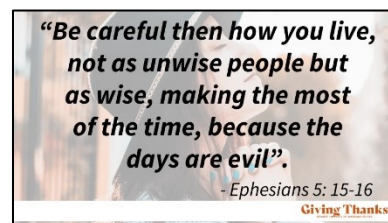
When have you taken the time out of your busy day to simply sit and rejoice in the blessings that God has

bestowed upon you? The thanksgiving chair does not have to be wooden with a leather seat. It can be metal, covered in green cloth. It can be a recliner in a tan fabric or a couch in a floral pattern. Wherever you are at this moment, you can offer God your thanksgiving. In this moment of quiet, let us each lift our own prayers of thanksgiving to the Lord our God... Amen.

Our passage today closes with the encouragement to practice *"giving thanks to God the Father at all times and for everything in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ"*. As we prepare to work our way to that verse, let us begin with a word of prayer...

Last week Pastor Michele reminded us that the letter to the Ephesians is about the health of the community. The main idea of today's message continues and develops this focus on living in community. Using Ephesians 5, verses 15-20, we will see how we are called to make the most of the time, not simply for ourselves and not primarily for ourselves, but for the world that needs the community of faith to live God's love out loud in transforming ways. As we delve into this idea today, please turn with me to Ephesians 5.

Our text today begins with a caution as to how we live. Paul encourages us to be wise in how we live, making the most of our time. The caution or perhaps challenge

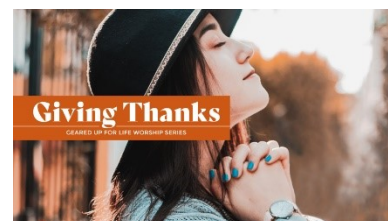


of living wisely comes from living in times that are evil. I do not believe that this has changed much in the two thousand years since Paul wrote this letter. In our world today there is much brokenness and suffering. While none of us probably had any trouble lifting a prayer or two of thanksgiving a moment ago, the reality is that some people in our communities would have to think hard to come up with things to be thankful for. Poverty and hunger exist all around us. Abusive and oppressive relationships and interpersonal dynamics weigh heavy on some in our communities. As individuals and as the community of faith, we can live wisely and make the most of our blessings by sharing our lives with others.

This morning this table with cooking and baking equipment reminds me of some of the ways that I have felt and shared God's blessings during my lifetime. Growing up and then when my children were little, time was spent baking and cooking together. Sometimes the cookies or bread or food was even shared with a neighbor or family in need, passing along some of God's blessings to friends and neighbors. Later in life the gift of cooking became a way to share God's blessings with the stranger in need – cooking a meal at the Mission or for those folks that come to Jesus' Hands ministry on Saturday morning. Some of you here shared in that expression of gratitude and service to others. Recently, on our trip to Montana, sharing this culinary gift and expressing my love of family came in the meals prepared and then shared around the table. Baking or cooking are but one way that we can share God's blessings with others.

At Grace we are doing this during August by supporting UMCOR's efforts to meet needs around the world. Last month it was helping families to be able to buy new clothes for the upcoming school year. When the community of faith lives God's love out loud in ways that impact our neighbors and brothers and sisters in Christ, then we are living wisely, building the kingdom of God as we stand against the evils of the world. When we live generously and selflessly, we are revealing God's grace as we elevate God's values over the values of the broken world. Doing so, we are also giving thanks at all times, living out our gratitude every day, allowing our service to God and others to bear witness to our faith.

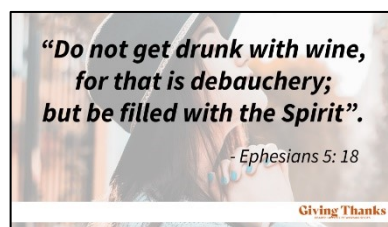
Paul also invites us to be "*careful*" in how we live. This invitation is not to watch out for ourselves or to keep ourselves pure and unstained by the world. Yes, we are called to live a life worthy of the calling. That was the main idea two weeks ago, right? But our call is to live out our faith while engaging the world – to be full of care for others. There are many who are struggling, wrestling with addictions or hatred or oppression or fear or prejudice or injustice. Paul calls us to live full of care, paying attention to the world around us, to the needs of our neighbors, to the despair that people are living in. When we choose to live full of care, we are choosing to make the most of our time – not simply for ourselves, but for the world that needs the community of faith to live God's love out loud in transforming and renewing ways. This way of living in the world is certainly part of how we give thanks to God.



Paul continues in verse 17, writing, "*So do not be foolish but understand what the will of the Lord is*". Paul is not encouraging us to challenge the social order or to fight against the ways of the world. For Paul, trying to "fix" the world would be foolish. Instead, Paul calls us to make this world as much like the kingdom of heaven as possible, preparing for the next world as we live in this one. But faith, my friends, cannot be simply about getting into heaven. When Jesus called his followers to transform the world, he wasn't asking us to make the world a better place or to make a positive difference. That is nice but the commission was to transform the world – to begin to bring in the next world as we seek to make disciples of all people so that they too will live with thanksgiving and gratitude for the love of God that they will come to know in their lives. This is the will of the Lord: to transform the world so it better reflects God's coming kingdom.

As Pastor Michele said last week, this way of living calls us to make the choice to stop living a corrupt, greedy, selfish way of life and to begin to adopt a new way of life – one that allows the love of God to change us as we kindly and gently encourage one another to live within God’s love.

As has been mentioned, this second half of our Ephesians worship series is the “how to” of the letter to the Ephesians. So, today, we ask: how do we live in ways that can transform the world? Look at verses eighteen and nineteen. These two verses give us direction and guidance on how to find the inner strength and power necessary to live in transforming ways. Here is verse eighteen: *"Do not get drunk with wine, for that is debauchery; but be filled with the Spirit"*. Many people do turn to wine and other things when faced with the difficulties of life, right? When honest, we must admit that at times we too turn to unhealthy choices when dealing with stress or anxiety or fear or worry.



Paul offers a better choice. Instead of seeking to find pleasure or satisfaction in wine or in any other thing of the world, Paul encourages us to turn to the Holy Spirit as the source of our joy and strength and power. When we live with an attitude of gratitude and thanksgiving we are not spared from the trials and sufferings of life, but we find encouragement and hope and peace amidst these hardships. The Holy Spirit is the source of these gifts.

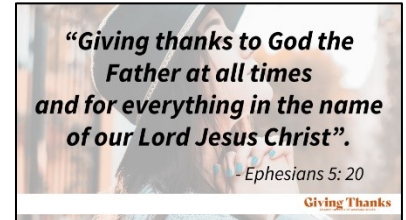


Continuing to verse nineteen, Paul shares one of the primary ways that the community of faith expresses joy and gives thanks. Here we are reminded of how we practice joy and thanksgiving within the community of

faith: *"As you sing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs among yourselves, singing and making melody to the Lord in your hearts"*. When the church gathers in voice to express our faith and belief in God, our hearts swell with God's presence and we feel the joy and love of Christ alive within us. Worship has and always will be one of the main ways we express our deepest gratitude to God.

Returning to the table, recognizing God's presence and his blessings in the ordinary of life can also lead to expressions of gratitude. When we slow down and take the time to be present to one another, to give of ourselves for the benefit of others, are these not moments when we make *"making melody to the Lord in your hearts"*? Reflecting on times when I have prepared food with the intent of blessing others, this time was a song lifted to God, a time of celebrating his love for me and for the other. When thanksgiving and gratitude have guided my actions, the results have often been the overflowing of that love, blessing both me and the one who received. Sometimes we do this together too. Towards the end of my two weeks of sabbatical leave, Kristin and I found ourselves at the cabin with her sister Lesly. After working at the ongoing cleaning and decluttering process we took a break in the afternoon to prepare a meal together. We chopped and cut and sauteed and mixed. We seasoned and tasted, adding a little more of this or that. We relaxed out on the deck as the quinoa and crab salad cooled, enjoying a drink and a time of conversation. And then we sat around the table, enjoying a leisurely meal together. What a blessing it was!

Time together, sharing in a meal, leads me to offer thanksgiving and praise to God. This is what Paul is talking about as he concludes our passage for today. In verse twenty, Paul gives us a core lesson on how to live as a disciple of Jesus Christ. Read this verse with me. The words will be on the screen: *"Giving thanks to God the Father at all times and for everything in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ"*. As we live lives of gratitude, we develop a heart bent on thanksgiving. A heart filled with gratitude leads us to all sorts of action, ministry, and service to God, to one another, and to our neighbors. In many ways gratitude to God is the foundation to true discipleship.



Giving thanks and living in gratitude raises our awareness of our need for grace and elevates our connection to the one who gives this blessing, Jesus

Christ. Living this way also opens us more to the indwelling presence of the Spirit within us, opening us further to God's divine presence. As we go forth, may we practice an attitude of gratitude, blessing others as we ourselves as blessed. May it be so for you and for me. Amen and amen.

**GPS – Grow, Pray, Study**

- 1) *Grow*. Reflecting upon the ways you have blessed others in the past as a means of expressing gratitude to God, how can you bless others this week?
- 2) *Pray*. In the week ahead, consider again your blessings. Spend some time in prayer this week thanking God and seeking discernment on how to better live with an “attitude of gratitude”.
- 3) *Study*. Read Psalm 100. In your times of quiet with God this week, how can you worship the Lord in this way?