

Tenth Sunday after Pentecost – Epistle

“MAKING THE MOST OF THE TIME”

Ephesians 5:15-20

Tenth Sunday after Pentecost (Proper 15)

Analysis by Steven E. Albertin

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

DIAGNOSIS: Foolishly Wasting Time

Step 1: Initial Diagnosis (External Problem) – *“The Days Are Evil” (5:16)*

I suspect that my parents had this passage in mind when as a child I was warned to “redeem the time.” Paul (or whoever is the author of Ephesians) in the same manner warns us to always be “making the most of the time.” Don’t waste it! Especially today in a world dominated by free market economics, we are continually reminded that “time is money.” Wasting time is wasting money. In a world where money and the bottom line are of ultimate importance, nothing matters more than making the most of your time. But such a life is difficult, because “the days

are evil (v. 16).” A world filled with competitors and rivals is a world that is threatening and ominous. Ultimately such a world has no regard for us. It is hostile and evil. Therefore, “Be careful then how you live, not as unwise people, but as wise, making the most of the time (vv. 15-16).” Faced with that kind of world and with that kind of threat, it should not be surprising that some seek relief in a stupor of drunkenness (v. 18).

Step 2: Advanced Diagnosis (Internal Problem) – *“Do not be Foolish” (5:17)*

But the problem is deeper. It is a matter of perception, of belief, of faith. We believe that we must make the most of the time because we believe that time is limited. There is not enough to go around. Therefore, we can’t afford to waste any of it. Even more, we believe that God is the one holding us accountable and responsible for redeeming our time. So, we work frantically with a fear and conviction that the value of our lives depends on how well we use our time. Our world admires those who use their time well and do not waste it. But the irony is that those who are obsessed with redeeming their time are really no different from those who are obsessed with wine and the promise of relief in drunkenness. Isn’t it interesting that “workaholic” is derived from “alcoholic?” One imbibes in wine and the other imbibes in work. Both are convinced that they must redeem the time in order to please God. But both look in the wrong place: one in the pleasure of inebriation and the other in the pleasure of work. But neither finds satisfaction. Both are mistaken. Both believe lies. Both are fools.

Step 3: Final Diagnosis (Eternal Problem) – *“Debauchery” (Totally Wasted!; 5:18)*

“Debauchery” sounds like a dirty word. “Debauchery” sounds like what goes on at a drunken orgy. Yes, it is that, but it is also more. Anyone who has ever woken up “the morning after” with a

hangover knows what is like to be “wasted.” They have discovered first hand that “debauchery” is indeed “wasteful behavior.” The same word is used to describe the “riotous living” of the prodigal son (Luke 15:13). A life that is frantically spent in “wasteful living,” whether it is wasted clinging to a bottle of wine or clinging to the dollars in a wallet, is truly a life that is debauched, totally wasted. I once heard a pastor say, “Who on their death bed has complained about not spending enough time at work?” Regardless of the piles of money we might amass, “you can’t take it with you.” Yet we foolishly keep on working as if we can finally stand up to the pressure to redeem the time. This deadly tic tock of the clock that haunts and harasses us in our daily life is finally the deadly tic tock of God’s own judgment. One day the soothing relief of our drug induced inebriations and the illusory successes of our workaholism will explode in our face. They will be exposed for the lies that they were. We thought we could placate God and abate the deadly tic tock of his clock, but we were wrong. The consequences of such foolishness are deadly. If this is the kind of God we believe in, then this is the kind of God we get. God gives us what we want and deserve: We are finally wasted (debauched)– totally and eternally.

PROGNOSIS: Wisely Wasting Time

Step 4: Initial Prognosis (Eternal Solution) – *“The Will of the Lord” (5:17)*

True wisdom lies not in the folly of our own will, of our own “-oholisms,” i.e., alcoholism and workaholism, but in the “will of God.” This will of God does not give us what we deserve. This will of God is expressed not in the deadly tic tock of the clock, i.e., God’s demand that we make the most of the time, but in Jesus Christ. He became one of us in this time to suffer with us and for us the consequences of our foolishness, i.e., sin. Jesus suffers the consequences of life lived under the deadly

tic tock of the clock and dies on the cross. But the first disciples declared that Jesus' death was "for us and our salvation." They announced that this was the will of God. But dead on the cross, Jesus looked like any other crucified criminal. The cross made his declarations about the Kingdom of God seem like the ultimate foolishness. But when Jesus is raised from the dead, God the Father declared that Jesus was indeed telling the truth. The will of God is grace and mercy. The will of God is not that we get what we deserve but that God gives us what we don't deserve. The will of God is not that WE must redeem the time but that GOD has redeemed the time FOR US. Why? Because God loves us! The resurrection of Jesus Christ assures us that "This is most certainly true!"

Step 5: Advanced Prognosis (Internal Solution) – “Filled with the Spirit” (5:18)

With a sense of irony we are urged not to get drunk on wine but to get drunk on God's Spirit. In other words, drinking up God's Spirit we are able to BELIEVE that Jesus did all this FOR US. Filled with the Spirit instead of the inebriating spirits of wine, we get to believe that the deadly tic tock of the clock has been silenced. (Isn't it interesting that on the first Pentecost, when God's Spirit was poured out upon the disciples, they were accused of being drunk? They were drunk, but on the Spirit and not new wine!) "Filled with the Spirit," we no longer have to live with the fear that the clock is running out on us. We no longer are under the pressure to have to redeem the time or else. Instead we get to live in a new time, in a new age, where we can always trust God and God's promises. In this new age and time, there are no limits. There is no death. There is no deadly tic tock of the clock. Here the tic tock of the clock is heard not as threat but as opportunity. Here time will never run out. Here there is no pressure to make the most of the time. Here there will always be enough of God's love and mercy to go

around. Relax! Here there is the peace that only God can give. In this new age there is always enough time to do whatever needs to be done!

Step 6: Final Prognosis (External Solution) – *“Singing and Making Melody to the Lord” (5:19)*

Now we can live life “not as unwise people but as wise” (v. 15). Now we can wisely use our time, not letting it go to waste. But surprisingly, shockingly, we are invited to do that in an activity that can only be considered an utter and absolute waste of time by the world: in worship, in “singing and making melody to the Lord” (v. 19). Worship is the ultimate waste of time to a world that foolishly believes that it must “make the most of the time” by its works and achievements. Worship doesn’t add one penny to the gross national product. Yet, in this new age of the Kingdom of God there is no more wise use of time than to “waste” it in worship. There we can do such absurd things as thank God “at all times and for everything” (v. 20). Yes, even in times of sorrow and hardship, of scarcity and famine, of sickness and death, such times that to the world seem to be of no use and an utter “waste,” we can worship God giving thanks. All because of “the name of our Lord Jesus Christ” (v. 20), all because of his victory over the deadly tic tock of the clock, there is no more useful act on earth than worship. There is no better way to “make the most of the time” than by “singing and making melody to the Lord” (v. 19)!