

The Second Sunday after Michaelmas
Ephesians 5:15-21: "We're in This Together."
October 10/11, 2020 | Saude, Jerico, & Redeemer Lutheran Churches

In Nomine Iesu

+ + +

Cleanse our minds, O Lord, we beseech You, of all anxious thoughts for ourselves, that we may learn not to trust in the abundance of what we have, except as tokens of Your goodness and grace, but that we may commit ourselves in faith to Your keeping, and devote all our energy of soul, mind and body to the work of Your kingdom and the furthering of the purposes of Your divine righteousness; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen. (*Parish Prayers*, ed. Frank Colquhoun, p. 121)

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Amen. (Rom. 1:7, etc.)

The sermon text for today is taken from the fifth chapter of St. Paul's Epistle to the Ephesians. We read selected verses in Jesus' name:

Look carefully then how you walk, not as unwise but as wise, making the best use of the time, because the days are evil. Therefore do not be foolish, but understand what the will of the Lord is. And do not get drunk with wine, for that is debauchery, but be filled with the Spirit, addressing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody to the Lord with your heart, giving thanks always and for everything to God the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, submitting to one another out of reverence for Christ. ^(ESV)

These are Your words, heavenly Father. Sanctify us by Your truth, Your Word is truth. Amen. (Joh. 17:17)

In Christ Jesus, whom we will trust and will not be afraid, for the LORD is our strength and our song, and He has become our salvation (Isa. 12:2), dear fellow redeemed:

It's hard to be very productive when you don't feel good. If you have a pounding headache, even simple tasks can take a long time to accomplish. If your back is out, walking across the room or up the stairs can seem nearly impossible. Even something as small as a hangnail or a blister can steal away the satisfaction and joy you would normally have in your work. What happens to just one small part of the body can have a big effect on the whole.

The apostle Paul speaks this way about the Christian Church. He says that all believers form one body. They are brought together and held together by Jesus, who is "the head of the body" (*Col. 1:17-18*). When each believer is in good spiritual health, the body of Christ remains healthy and strong. But when a believer forgets that he is part of something bigger than himself, and he makes decisions that suit him alone, the whole body suffers.

Today's text teaches us more about this. Paul explains how the body of Christ needs to walk together, think together, eat and drink and sing together – in other words how the body uses its legs, its mind, and its mouth.

Paul mentions walking together six times in his short Epistle to the Ephesians. He says that we must collectively watch our step, look carefully how we walk. There are obstacles, traps, and pitfalls all over the place where the devil wants believers to stumble and fall. We do not run recklessly along in this world assuming the road ahead will be smooth and easy. We choose our steps wisely and listen closely to the voice of our Good Shepherd as He leads us through this dark valley (Ps. 23:4).

But even though we know there is danger ahead, the Church does not sit still. We don't hide under the bed. God has put us in this particular time and place for a reason. We might wish we lived in a different era, but God knows better. He has a purpose for us, and as long as He gives us breath, that purpose stands.

God has created and redeemed us, so that we might walk in the good works He has prepared for us (Eph. 2:10). He calls us to walk in humility, gentleness, patience, and love toward one another, eager to maintain our unity on the basis of His Word (4:1-3). He warns us not to walk like the unbelievers, "*darkened in their understanding,*" stubbornly set on sin (4:17-19). We "*walk in love, as Christ loved us*" (5:2). We walk "*as children of light*" because Jesus is the light (5:8).

If we decide to walk each in our own direction, doing whatever we feel like doing, the mission of Christ's Church is harmed. But what if we are not sure what direction we should go? It often happens in life that we stand at a crossroads and face two choices or a number of choices that all seem good. This may happen if you have multiple job offers, or if you have talents and interests that could take you in any number of different directions.

Then it's time to ask some questions:

- Am I focusing more on myself or others?
- Which opportunity would be most beneficial to my neighbor?
- Which one would most glorify God?
- Which one would best enable me to stay focused on my spiritual needs?

Many make their decisions about the future based on worldly considerations – what will be the best for them, what will earn the highest wage, what makes them the happiest. But we are called to "*Set [our] minds on things that are above, not on things that are on earth*" (Col. 3:2).

Today's text says, "*do not be foolish, but understand what the will of the Lord is.*" We need to think about what God wants for us before we set off. Knowing comes before going. So what is His will for us? God's will is that we believe the Gospel message. Jesus said, "*For this is the will of my Father, that everyone who looks on the Son and believes in him should have eternal life, and I will raise him up on the last day*" (Joh. 6:40). God wants us to know and believe His promise of salvation, so we will join Him eternally in heaven.

He also wants us to avoid anything in this life that could cause us to lose our faith in him. He wants us to understand the evil forces that are working against us. He wants us to be diligent in prayer and the study of His Word, so we are not caught unprepared when trials and temptations come (see 1Th. 4:3-8, 5:16-18).

The functions of the body are all controlled and guided by the head. This is good news for us Christians, since Christ is the Head of His body, the Church. Jesus does not steer us wrong. He

does not wish any harm to come to the body but wants it to grow stronger and healthier. He may allow trials to afflict us, so that we learn to follow His lead and put our trust in Him. This is what the athlete does when pushing his body beyond its comfort level and even into pain. The will of the mind tells the rest of the body to keep moving, keep working, keep fighting.

What Jesus has won for us and still gives us is worth the discomfort and pain we may feel in this world. God's Son came among us in the flesh, so that He might satisfy the righteous requirements of the Law for us. He came to redeem us from all our sins. And He came to win the victory for us over our sin, death, and the devil. Jesus is the reigning Champion; He cannot be overcome. That means the Church, which is connected to Him, can't lose either. Jesus will never give up on His Church, so the Church should never give up. *"In the world you will have tribulation,"* said Jesus. *"But take heart; I have overcome the world"* (Joh. 16:33).

So we put our trust in Him. He will never lead us wrong. He won't abandon us. We go forward step by step in the confidence of His promises. When we stumble and fall, He picks us up. When we let worries and fears overcome us, He forgives us. We live in His grace, a grace which never runs out, grace which applies equally to every part of the body, to strong and weak, to fearless or fearful.

We remind one another of His grace when we join together for worship. It is unnatural for the members of the body of Christ to be apart. Last spring you may have seen the hashtag "alonetogether" on TV or social media. In a state of isolation, we understood the "alone" part all too well, but not so much the "together" part. God intends for His children to join together to worship Him. This is how they comfort and encourage one another (Heb. 10:24-25).

We need this support from each other. We receive it in the divine service by listening to the words of the pastor who speaks as God's representative. We also receive it by hearing our fellow Christians speak and sing around us. This is what Paul is describing when he talks about *"addressing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs"* and *"giving thanks"* together. Every voice matters in our churches. The fewer the voices, the more isolated we feel. The more voices there are, the more we are reminded that we are part of something bigger than ourselves.

We are part of a larger community as members of the body of Christ. So Paul urges us always to keep our brothers and sisters in Christ in mind. We are not to *"get drunk with wine,"* he says, *"for that is debauchery"*—that is to indulge oneself, to ignore those around us in fulfillment of our own desires. Instead we Christians should *"be filled with the Spirit."*

Now alcohol is poured down the throat and enters our bloodstream. If consumed in large quantities, it impairs us—it makes our ability to walk and think and speak worse, not better. But being *"filled with the Spirit"* does the opposite. We are filled with the Holy Spirit by hearing the Word of Christ's forgiveness. We even eat and drink this forgiveness when the Holy Spirit brings us Jesus' true body and blood in His holy Supper.

The work of the Holy Spirit through the Word and Sacraments makes us spiritually healthier. He works through these means to increase our collective strength, sharpen our spiritual focus, and cause us to clearly speak of Him with one voice. And He inspires us to sing of the hope we have *"in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody to the Lord with [our]*

heart[s].” He moves us to sing the Gospel to each other, the good news of our life, our forgiveness, and our salvation in Christ.

This powerful Gospel message is how the Lord draws us closer together. If we fail to partake of His Word and Sacraments, or if we decide to go our own way, we weaken the unity and fellowship God has blessed us with. But walking with Jesus by faith, meditating together on His Word, and proclaiming His grace to one another, our unity and fellowship are strengthened.

God does not intend for us to fight our spiritual battles alone or to go through this life alone. We are too weak for that. He brings us here to build us up. He reminds us that **We’re in This Together**. By His grace, He helps us to walk forward more confidently, think more clearly, and sing more joyfully.

Glory be to the Father and to the Son and to the Holy Ghost; as it was in the beginning, is now, and ever shall be, forevermore. Amen.

+ + +