

Ephesians 5:15-20

15 Be careful 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 among yourselves, 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 (NRSV).

First of all I like it that Thanksgiving falls right before Advent because as I reflect on the one thing that I am most thankful for it is Jesus. Ephesians is about blessing God as a response to God blessing us. Recently I was reading in the devotional where a woman wrote "Give thanks to God for everything." I admit I preach that a lot because everything we have comes from God. But then I read where she wrote "Thank God for everything not only that which is apparently good." I found myself reflecting on that idea. Give thanks to God even for the things that do not appear to be good. What do you think about that? She is right. It is easy to thank God for the good but it is much harder to thank God for everything.

In the Scripture today verse 15 is a call to live wisely. This is a matter of discerning the will of God. The wise know and do the will of God and live according to God's will. Verse 16 tells us that the days are evil. The point of the Scripture is that wisdom is needed. Seek to know God, focus on pleasing God, and avoid things that displease God. This takes wisdom. Since there is evil in world, we need to be wise and be careful how we live. Live a life of devotion and look for opportunities to do good. One thing that the Scripture reveals is that God allows evil to exist. It is important for us to know this because some people do not believe it. If you read the Bible it is revealed frequently from the beginning to the end that God allows evil to exist. Verse 18 states do not get drunk with wine. Some will preach a prohibition against drinking but that is not what the Bible teaches. Scriptures do not forbid drinking alcohol. In fact the sacrament is bread and wine. What is forbidden is drunkenness. You are to be filled with the Spirit. This is a sermon on its own and has been talked about on many occasions and in different ways. From Pentecost on we have an indwelling of the Holy Spirit. So, the lesson is this, there is evil in the world but you are to live righteously and be filled with the Spirit. This lesson theme (be filled with Holy Spirit and live righteously) is repeated many times in Bible. Verse 20, give thanks to God for everything. This is where the lesson from the devotional comes in. It is easy to thank God for the good things. Our blessings are too numerous to count: life, air, water, lots food, a beautiful creation, and a surplus of comforts. It is much harder to thank God for everything because this means to thank God for the not so good.

I was serving as an Assistant Chaplain in Martinsville and I visited a man in a room that refused pastoral care. That's OK, it's part of the job. I asked why and he told me that he does not believe in God. As a chaplain I have to respect that. In this case I stretched the boundaries a little and asked him if there was a reason for this? He said "God let my wife die." As a chaplain I was not in a position to preach, convert, witness, or correct misguided embedded theology. My mission was in regards to current spiritual needs of the individual according to his religious beliefs. So, there was nothing that I could do. Many times I have reflected upon this one situation. I often thought about how this man does not get it. He turned against God because he didn't get his way. Here is the real deal. He turned against God, the one who sent his own son to

suffer and die for us. If God sending his own son to suffer and die for you is not good enough, then what is? He rejected God because his wife died when God's very own son suffered and died for us. I Wonder, did he ever really have faith to begin with? He did not question a billion people starving, or children that die of cancer, or the 40,000 people that die every year in car wrecks here in America. His concern was when it affects him. This is a selfish position.

I was taking a class this past summer at Warren Wilson College and this person talked in class about when her mother lost her faith. I questioned, "Did she ever have faith?" The person said "Yes, she went to church and participated in the services." I said "OK, but she didn't have a problem with God due to terrorists attacks, or the millions that were murdered during the Holocaust, or even the 400,000 people that are murdered every year in the world. She was OK with God when bad things happen to other people. The only challenge to her faith came when something bad hit closer to home. If she ever had faith it was very weak faith. I'm not to judge but she gave up on God when God did not match her ideology. In that case, it is about her not about God. She gave up on the God that did not give up on her. She gave up on the God that instead offered to her grace and love." Jesus puts it much better that I ever can. The one who received the seed that fell on rocky place hears the word but it has no root so when trouble comes along, it quickly falls away.

The main thing is not a matter of living by a detailed moral and legal observance. The main thing is to turn away from the old way of life for a new life with Jesus. People need to take the time and energy to reflect on God and study the word of God. Don't just say "I am in the Jesus group." Be devoted to Jesus. Know the word so you can follow the word. It is a matter of your world view; how you see yourself in the God and human relationship. You are a child of God. That is an amazing family dynamic. As a child of God, you love God, you love your relationship with God, you love serving God, you love being in communion with God, and you love to praise and worship God. Give thanks to God for God has done many wonderful things for us and deserves our praise. Thank God for everything, for everything that you have comes from the creator and we have a multitude of blessings to be thankful for.