

## **SCRIPTURE READINGS AND SERMON**

### **Thirteenth Sunday After Pentecost**

**August 15, 2021**

#### **Psalm 34:11-22 (ESV):**

11 Come, O children, listen to me;

I will teach you the fear of the LORD.

12 What man is there who desires life

and loves many days, that he may see good?

13 Keep your tongue from evil

and your lips from speaking deceit.

14 Turn away from evil and do good;

seek peace and pursue it.

15 The eyes of the LORD are toward the righteous

and his ears toward their cry.

16 The face of the LORD is against those who do evil,

to cut off the memory of them from the earth.

17 When the righteous cry for help, the LORD hears

and delivers them out of all their troubles.

18 The LORD is near to the brokenhearted

and saves the crushed in spirit.

19 Many are the afflictions of the righteous,

but the LORD delivers him out of them all.

20 He keeps all his bones;

not one of them is broken.

21 Affliction will slay the wicked,

and those who hate the righteous will be condemned.

22 The LORD redeems the life of his servants;

none of those who take refuge in him will be condemned.

#### **First Reading: Proverbs 9:1–10 (ESV):**

##### **The Way of Wisdom**

9 Wisdom has built her house;

she has hewn her seven pillars.

2 She has slaughtered her beasts; she has mixed her wine;  
she has also set her table.

3 She has sent out her young women to call  
from the highest places in the town,

4 “Whoever is simple, let him turn in here!”

To him who lacks sense she says,

5 “Come, eat of my bread  
and drink of the wine I have mixed.

6 Leave your simple ways, and live,  
and walk in the way of insight.”

7 Whoever corrects a scoffer gets himself abuse,  
and he who reproves a wicked man incurs injury.

8 Do not reprove a scoffer, or he will hate you;  
reprove a wise man, and he will love you.

9 Give instruction to a wise man, and he will be still wiser;  
teach a righteous man, and he will increase in learning.

10 The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom,  
and the knowledge of the Holy One is insight.

### **Joshua 24:1 (ESV):**

#### **Choose Whom You Will Serve**

24 Joshua gathered all the tribes of Israel to Shechem and summoned the elders, the heads, the judges, and the officers of Israel. And they presented themselves before God. Joshua 24:14–18 (ESV): 14 “Now therefore fear the LORD and serve him in sincerity and in faithfulness. Put away the gods that your fathers served beyond the River and in Egypt, and serve the LORD. 15 And if it is evil in your eyes to serve the LORD, choose this day whom you will serve, whether the gods your fathers served in the region beyond the River, or the gods of the Amorites in whose land you dwell. But as for me and my house, we will serve the LORD.”

16 Then the people answered, “Far be it from us that we should forsake the LORD to serve other gods, 17 for it is the LORD our God who brought us and our fathers up from the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery, and who did those great signs in our sight and preserved us in all the way that we went, and among all the peoples through whom we passed. 18 And the LORD drove out before us all the peoples, the Amorites who lived in the land. Therefore we also will serve the LORD, for he is our God.”

Ephesians 5:6–21 (ESV): 6 Let no one deceive you with empty words, for because of these things the wrath of God comes upon the sons of disobedience. 7 Therefore do not become partners with them; 8 for at one time you were darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Walk as children of light 9 (for the fruit of light is found in all that is good and right and true), 10 and try to discern what is pleasing to the Lord. 11 Take no part in the unfruitful works of darkness, but instead expose them. 12 For it is shameful even to speak of the things that they do in secret. 13 But when anything is exposed by the light, it becomes visible, 14 for anything that becomes visible is light. Therefore it says,

“Awake, O sleeper,  
and arise from the dead,  
and Christ will shine on you.”

15 Look carefully then how you walk, not as unwise but as wise, 16 making the best use of the time, because the days are evil. 17 Therefore do not be foolish, but understand what the will of the Lord is. 18 And do not get drunk with wine, for that is debauchery, but be filled with the Spirit, 19 addressing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody to the Lord with your heart, 20 giving thanks always and for everything to God the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, 21 submitting to one another out of reverence for Christ.

**EPISTLE: Ephesians 5:6–21 (ESV):**

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#### **THE GOSPEL - John 6:51–69 (ESV):**

**51** I am the living bread that came down from heaven. If anyone eats of this bread, he will live forever. And the bread that I will give for the life of the world is my flesh.”

**52** The Jews then disputed among themselves, saying, “How can this man give us his flesh to eat?” **53** So Jesus said to them, “Truly, truly, I say to you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you have no life in you. **54** Whoever feeds on my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up on the last day. **55** For my flesh is true food, and my blood is true drink. **56** Whoever feeds on my flesh and drinks my blood abides in me, and I in him. **57** As the living Father sent me, and I live because of the Father, so whoever feeds on me, he also will live because of me. **58** This is the bread that came down from heaven, not like the bread the fathers ate, and died. Whoever feeds on this bread will live forever.” **59** Jesus said these things in the synagogue, as he taught at Capernaum.

## The Words of Eternal Life

60 When many of his disciples heard it, they said, "This is a hard saying; who can listen to it?" 61 But Jesus, knowing in himself that his disciples were grumbling about this, said to them, "Do you take offense at this? 62 Then what if you were to see the Son of Man ascending to where he was before? 63 It is the Spirit who gives life; the flesh is no help at all. The words that I have spoken to you are spirit and life. 64 But there are some of you who do not believe." (For Jesus knew from the beginning who those were who did not believe, and who it was who would betray him.) 65 And he said, "This is why I told you that no one can come to me unless it is granted him by the Father." 66 After this many of his disciples turned back and no longer walked with him. 67 So Jesus said to the twelve, "Do you want to go away as well?" 68 Simon Peter answered him, "Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life, 69 and we have believed, and have come to know, that you are the Holy One of God."

## Sermon 32 – Thirteenth Sunday After Pentecost "Walking Wise" Ephesians 5:6-21

Dear friends,

The epistle lesson for today is from Paul's letter to the Ephesians, and it jives very well with the reading from Proverbs, so I'm gonna hop back and forth a bit to try to make my point, assuming I have one. Paul is talking doing what he does a lot, he's contrasting one thing with another. In this case, he's contrasting a life of idolatry with a life of faithful worship. He's contrasting a life of unbelief with the life of a believer. That's all fine and dandy, but it is how Paul is doing it that I find curious. Paul casts this contrast in terms of what is wise and what is foolish, what is light and what is dark. The wisdom of God and the foolishness of unbelieving man is what lines up so nicely with what Proverbs has to say. The most challenging thing about this is it changes the definition of the good life. It forces us to change how we view our lives and what is valuable about them. Paul lays it

all out here, but that grinds against what we want out of our life, so it becomes necessary to preach on this.

With that in mind, here's Paul. I'm starting at verse 15: **“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.”** Paul urges us to go our way through life wisely, rather than unwisely, and he helpfully tells us how we do that. We do that by seeking to understand the will of the Lord. What does God want? What does He want us to do, and why does He want us to do it? This is in contrast to the unbeliever, the same unbeliever inside every one of us, that doesn't care what God wants and is focused on what I want instead. That is folly, but seeking what the Lord wants is living wisely. Proverbs echoes this. At the very end of the reading of Proverbs it says that the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom, and the knowledge of the Holy One is insight.

What struck me here is that living wisely is living well. I never particularly thought of life in those terms, I don't know about you. I thought being wise or being street-smart as something that helped you have a good life. That it was a tool that helped your life go more smoothly. I always thought that the goal was a good life, but Paul here has changed my idea at least of what a good life is.

There is no quicker way to see how corrupting and selfish sin is than by looking at what we ultimately consider the best things in life, or a good life, as far as I am concerned, particularly when you contrast them with what God considers the best things in life. So quick thought exercise. I want you to start a short top-five list of the things that make a good life. What would be your best life now? What makes a good life to you?

Now contrast that picture with what you've just heard. The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom. Understand what the will of the Lord is. Add to those words these: **“Be filled with the Spirit, addressing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody to the Lord with all 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.”** If you're like me, that just yanked you out of a nice fantasy life and tossed you straight into something else entirely. Did you hear that description of God's idea of a good life for you? Filled with the Spirit. Singing hymns. Seeking wisdom. Discerning the will of the Lord. No mountains to climb. No camping trips. Not one mention of hunting, in fact he doesn't even talk about firearms at all, in the good life. Nothing about sunny days, good jobs, no health problems, or a peaceful family. Not a nice bubble bath and some alone time, not even a good book to read on the porch. God tells you that the good life is seeking wisdom, giving thanks to God, and submitting to one another out of reverence for Christ.

That doesn't sound like the good life to me. That sounds like the obligations you get out of the way as fast as possible so you can go back to the good life. That sounds like the stuff that gets between you and a life worth living. And that's what hit me so hard about these words. God through Paul is redefining what life is all about.

Our basic understanding of how life works is that you do the things you have to do so you can be free to do the things you want to do. Sometimes that pattern breaks, and we dedicate our time or energy to something that seems important enough to set aside our own wants and needs. We all know as Christians that we should put others ahead of ourselves. We all know that God should be an important part of our life. What Paul is challenging us to think about is how central God should be in our life.

As sinners this is entirely against the grain of how we not only behave naturally, but how we're trained to behave as well. It's against the grain of all the messages the world sends our way. Even if we're not completely self-absorbed, the idea that life is about seeking the will of God, that life is about submitting to our neighbor, and seeking the wisdom found in the Scriptures, seems so odd and weird. Only a Christian can understand this, why we do it, what we get from it. Don't be shy about this. Be proud of it. We know our place. We know our purpose. We know that God loves us, and that we

are supposed to show that love to those around us. We know that God puts us into places with people to serve them.

Sin makes us self-centered, but it also limits our understanding to this earth and to this life. We understand the concept of virtue, civic-mindedness, social justice. But what God tells us is tied into that incredible verse from Romans, where He reminds us that even our efforts to do good works are ultimately not just self-defeating, but expressions of our own ego. Even when we do good, we never do it for the right reasons, and when the final word is said we're just doing it for ourselves. That's what sin has made us. That's why God has Paul write these words telling us that we've been called out of that sin, that we've been redeemed from that self-absorbed state. Pagans know how to be good, decent citizens. They know how to be nice people. In many respects they're far better at that than Christians ever will be, such is the crazy paradox of this world. But God is calling us and has called us to be something else: He has called us to be Christians. His people, following His rules, not the rules of polite society. We are to be children of light, not children of the world.

The good news is that He has done this. Christ came to this earth, lived our lives perfectly, and He gives you that perfect life when He justifies you. He takes away Your sins, your selfishness, and He pins it to the cross to die with Jesus. He brings Jesus out from the grave and when He does that He brings a new you out of the old, a perfect you, one fits this description to a T. We struggle to line up our earthly lives so they look like this, and we will as long as we're on this earth. But that very struggle is why God writes these words.

God knows you're a sinner. He knows that you will continue to wrestle with your sinfulness as long as you're alive. He not only forgives that sin, He gives you the path to walk. Paul tells you to be careful how you walk, because God knows that the way is fraught with peril, that it's dangerous to be on this earth in this flesh because we're always at risk

of screwing something up. You want to live a good life? Paul asks. Learn about Jesus. Seek wisdom. Understand God's will.

So what are these things? What is wisdom? Wisdom is the words God gives you in Bible. How do you understand God's will? You hear the Scriptures, you listen as they're read, you read them yourselves, you listen as their preached. God's will is for you to bring your sins to Him, tell Him you're sorry, so He can take away those sins and teach you a more excellent way, the way of love. The way of giving up what I want for the sake of what they want. The way of putting the needs of others ahead of our own preferences. Submitting to one another. With that attitude in mind, that attitude of others first, me last, we turn to the truth. We should be faithful with the truth, repeating what God says in the face of everything the world tells us. There is a God. There is right and wrong. That God will judge right and wrong. He has judged right and wrong, and told us all about it throughout the Bible. In the Ten Commandments, in the Sermon on the Mount, and everywhere in between. It is not loving to continue perpetuating a lie, but it is equally unloving to walk around thinking we are God's gift to just about anything. We are sinners who sin and misunderstand and fail to see. That humility inspires us to seek whatever wisdom we can find, share it, and return to see more. It's a wonderfully recursive loop when you put it into practice. We never get too full of ourselves, always trying to do better, but we never forget that we are trying to better for the people we share our life with. Our families, our co-workers, and so on.

Amen