

ALL ARE WELCOME IN THIS PLACE – SUNDAY FOUR

Cross of Glory Evangelical Lutheran Church

Let's Build a Place of Worship and Praise

Ephesians 5:15-20

¹⁵ Be very careful, then, how you live-- not as unwise but as wise, ¹⁶ making the most of every opportunity, because the days are evil. ¹⁷ Therefore do not be foolish, but understand what the Lord's will is. ¹⁸ Do not get drunk on wine, which leads to debauchery. Instead, be filled with the Spirit. ¹⁹ Speak to one another with psalms, hymns and spiritual songs. Sing and make music in your heart to the Lord, ²⁰ always giving thanks to God the Father for everything, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.

For the past three weeks, we have discussed the kind of church we want to build here at Cross of Glory. We began by emphasizing the central message of our church – Christ crucified. We then looked at the way God communicates that message through our church—by using the means of grace. Last week, we saw how we want our church to be salt and light in the world, reaching out to others. This last week of our series, we focus on the kind of place we want this church to be – a shelter of worship and praise in an increasingly evil world. Not only do we want the church building we construct to be a place of worship and praise, but we also want each of our members' lives to be ones filled with worship and praise of our Lord Jesus Christ.

The section of Paul's letter to the Ephesians that we are looking at is taken from a part of the book where Paul is writing to the Ephesians about how they are to live their Christian lives in the midst of a pagan society. Ephesus at this time was a major cultural center of the world. Because of its important location near the sea and at the intersection of major trade routes, there were many different people that flooded the streets of the city every day of the year. As you might guess, there were also many different heathen religions that were practiced in the city. Idolatry was a common practice in the city of Ephesus, especially the worship of the fertility goddess, Artemis. Along with the idolatry, there were many forms of immorality. Drunkenness, and other sins that resulted from it, abounded. It is easy to understand why Paul wrote to the Ephesians, "*The days are evil.*"

Living in a society such as this one, the Ephesians would be called on to make many choices—who they would spend their time with, the kind of activities they would participate in, etc. As they went about making these choices day after day, Paul encouraged them with these words: "*Be very careful, then, how you live—not as unwise but as wise...Therefore do not be foolish but understand what the Lord's will is.*" Paul wanted the Ephesians to evaluate every choice they made. The litmus test for whether or not it was a good choice was to be the Lord's holy and perfect will. This was not an easy task for the Ephesians and it was probably one they failed at more than once.

We are faced with the same kind of day-to-day choices that faced those Ephesians long ago. One does not have to look far in our society to find the kind of wickedness that Paul warned the Ephesians about. We see it on the television. We hear it promoted in the music on the radio. It

influences our neighbors and our family members. The kind of sexual indiscretions that were shameful just fifty years ago are now celebrated by our society. The greed and the love of money, which the Bible calls the root of all kinds of evil, is an essential part of twenty-first century American culture. This is the environment in which we find ourselves living.

What kind of choices will we make? Is every one of our choices in line with God's will? Sadly, we have to confess that there are many times we make the wrong choices. Instead of making the most of opportunity to do the right thing, we follow in the well-worn path of wickedness that those around us would have us walk. The influence of a wicked society can be seen in every one of our lives—whether it comes in the form of drunkenness, or sexual sins of lust, or sins of greed and envy. As we think about worship this morning, we have to confess that we often worship the false gods of our selfish desires in place of the one true God.

How do we remedy this situation? Paul uses a very vivid illustration to show what the solution to this problem is: *“Do not get drunk on wine, which leads to debauchery. Instead, be filled with the Spirit”* Paul is saying, “Don't be filled up with all the wicked things this world has to offer, rather be filled with the Spirit which God offers you freely. Then Paul goes on to show one wonderful way in which the Ephesians were able to be filled with the Spirit. Paul writes: *“Speak to one another with psalms, hymns and spiritual songs.”* In this verse, Paul describes the kind of worship that took place in the church of Ephesus. Amazingly enough, it is similar to the kind of worship we participate in even today. The Ephesians were able to be filled with the Spirit by participating in the psalms, hymns and other songs that were used in worship.

We don't have still with us many of the hymns or spiritual songs that the Ephesians would have used to strengthen their faith. However, the psalms of which Paul writes have been preserved for us in the Bible. It is easy to see how these songs could be used to fill the Ephesians with the Spirit. The psalms are very rich in life-giving theology. They speak of the many attributes of God. They recount his wonderful deeds in saving his people. They proclaim the gospel of the Savior who would come and rescue all mankind from death. As they sang these beautiful words and other similar hymns, they proclaimed the good news to their own hearts and to the hearts of those who were gathered with them. In this way, God was able to use music to fill his people with his Spirit.

But that is not the only purpose for the music of which Paul was writing. He also wrote to those Ephesian Christians, *“Sing and make music in your heart to the Lord, always giving thanks to God the Father for everything, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.”* The music they were to use served not only the purpose of filling their own souls with the Spirit, but it was also used to give thanks and praise to God. Both of these purposes are achieved when the gift of music is joined with the gospel message of Christ's redemption. In this way, Christians are able to both praise God for his wonderful works and also fill their own souls with the pardon and peace that always accompanies the gospel.

This is when music achieves its highest goal—when it is joined with the Word of God. Many of the songs of the Lutheran liturgy and hymnody accomplish this very goal. They speak God's Word. Because of this fact we are sometimes accused of singing too much about God and not

singing enough praise to God. This distinction, however, is really a false one. Singing about God and singing praise to God can be one and the same thing. As Luther writes, “*We praise God best when we proclaim his Word, not when we say ‘he is an awesome God.’ When the redemptive note is at the core, we praise him best. We praise him for his redeeming acts by telling others and ourselves about his redeeming acts.*”

The effect that such praise has on our hearts and our souls is really beyond measure. Think of an Easter Sunday morning. It’s wonderful to be able to hear the beautiful Easter account read in the Gospel. It is very uplifting to hear that gospel message proclaimed also in the sermon. But your soul really soars when you join together with your fellow Christians in singing, “*I Know that My Redeemer Lives.*” Great Easter hymns such as this one are able to do just as much, if not more, for your soul than the sermon on that Easter morning.

Of course, the great music of the Church is not confined to Easter morning. Week after week, we have the opportunity to praise God in the songs of our liturgy and our hymns. Let’s make the most of every opportunity that is presented us. We do this by concentrating on the texts that we are singing and lifting up our voices to the best of our ability. Because, as Paul points out, “*The days are evil.*” And one of the weapons the Lord has given us to combat the evil influence of this world on our souls is the music that we sing every Sunday morning. By this music, God can fill our souls with his Spirit and make know to us his perfect will. Let’s build a place of worship and praise. **Amen.**

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