

# Walking in Wisdom

Ephesians 5:15-20

I like this illustration that Keryn found. It's just right for the first verse in our text, which when translated literally reads, *Be careful how you walk, not as unwise people but as wise ones.* The yellow warning sign itself means 'be careful' and then the message: 'Walk carefully, being wise'. The picture is of life as a journey on foot (remembering we've only had cars the last 100 years). Walk your journey of life as a wise person. Walk in wisdom.



Lutherans have much to say about grace and faith—that we are saved by grace through faith—and so we should, because that's the heart of the gospel. However, we don't talk much about wisdom, which is a fruit of faith, a fruit of the new life in Christ. But actually we should talk more about wisdom in these foolish times, not least because there is quite a large body of wisdom literature in the Bible. We are certainly going to talk about it today, because wisdom is in all the readings today.

Wisdom in today's other readings:

- *Proverbs 9:1-6*



The Invitation of Lady Wisdom:  
*Come eat of my bread  
and drink of the wine I have mixed,  
Lay aside immaturity, and live,  
and walk in the way of insight*

Proverbs, from which the first reading comes, is a whole book of wisdom: how a devout believer should live their life. In chapter 9, our reading for today, there is a gracious invitation. Wisdom is personified. Lady Wisdom has built her house and prepared a banquet. She calls out to passers-by, the simple and senseless, inviting them to her banquet:

Come eat my bread and drink the wine I have mixed.  
Lay aside immaturity, and live, and walk in ways of insight.

Psalms 34, which we sang before, also puts before us a gracious invitation to be wise:

Come, O children, listen to me;  
I will teach you reverence for the

Lord.

[You want to be wise?]

You desire life and covet many days  
to enjoy good?

[OK, then watch what you say and

do.]

Keep your tongue from evil and your lips from speaking deceit.  
Depart from evil and do good. Seek peace and pursue it.

• *Psalm 34:9-14*

Again, an invitation to be wise:

Come, O children, listen to me;  
I will teach you reverence  
for the Lord...

Depart from evil, and do good;  
Seek peace, and pursue it.

• *John 6*

Peter, sometimes rash and foolhardy,  
makes the wise choice:

Lord, to whom can we go?  
You have the words  
of eternal life.

The Gospel reading from John 6 is not wisdom literature, nevertheless the theme of wisdom comes through strongly. Like Lady Wisdom, Jesus has invited the people to a kind of banquet: *I am the living bread that came down from heaven. Whoever eats of this bread will live forever.* But when Jesus says that HE is this bread—'the bread that I will give for the life of the world is my flesh', my body and blood—then people take offence and start turning

away in droves. Jesus then says to the Twelve, Are you going too? Then Peter, so often rash and foolhardy, makes the right decision at this crunch time and speaks wisely and well. Words of wisdom indeed: Lord, to whom shall we go? YOU have the words of eternal life. Yes, Lord, you are the living bread, and your life-giving words nourish us for eternal life.

And now we come to Wisdom in Ephesians, and especially in our text, chapter 5:15-20. When you think about it, Ephesians is an astonishing piece of writing. Imagine: Paul in prison. Christians a small and persecuted minority, powerless before the might of Rome. Christians themselves often new in faith and sometimes weak in faith; prone to fall back into old pagan ways; sometimes divided and at each other, arguing about doctrine and practice, falling into factions. And yet what Paul in chains sets before his motley crew of Christians is nothing less than a noble vision of God's great plan for the whole cosmos. The world looks to be in a bad way, but God has an exalted plan not just to rescue a faithful believing remnant, but to gather up *all things* in Christ, things in heaven and things on earth. In other words, Jesus' death on the cross for our sins and his glorious resurrection from the dead has inaugurated a glorious transformation of the whole cosmos, beginning with whom? – beginning with you who believe in Christ Jesus! You, dear Christians, are the first-fruits of God's new creation. You are the body of Christ permeating the whole cosmos, you are created in Christ Jesus for a new life. You are the living signs of the renewal of the whole world and the entire cosmos. God's plan is to gather up all things in Christ, things in heaven and things on earth.

**Wisdom in Ephesians**  
Ephesians sets forth God's great plan for the whole cosmos:  
– to gather up all things in Christ, things in heaven and things on earth  
– we are the body of Christ in the cosmos  
– created in Christ for a new way of life

So, the first part of Ephesians puts before us this marvellous vision of salvation for the whole cosmos. In the second part of the letter, Paul gets quite practical about how we should live out our part in God's great plan, as the redeemed and renewed people of God. This pastoral and practical teaching begins at chapter 4:1: *I Paul, therefore, the prisoner in the Lord, beg you to lead a life worthy of the calling to which you have been called.* But if you look at that in Greek it actually says, to walk worthily of the calling to which you were called. So there is a kind of 'two ways' teaching going on here, as you often find in wisdom literature (cf Psalm 1). This is the way you used to walk when you were

godless pagans. And here is the new way – this is how you walk in Christ, this is how you walk in wisdom.



And that brings us to the words of our text, which is just a few verses of this practical teaching on living the new life. *Be careful*, Paul writes, *how you walk, not as unwise [pagans], but as wise people [of God], making the most of the time, for the days are evil.* Quite literally it says, as you can read in the old King James version, ‘...redeeming the time, for the days are evil.’ Those words have made a deep impression on me because I remember

old Dr Hoopmann preaching on them when I was a child, and I can still hear him saying those words over and over in his characteristic voice: ... *redeeming the time, for the days are evil.*

‘Redeeming the time’, that is, buying back the time. Well, as you know full well, you can’t buy back time. O how we wish we could buy back time, and how aware of that we become as we grow older and know that suddenly the time left to us has become short, very short.

Let’s think about our own lives. Don’t you regret the time you have wasted and squandered because you didn’t use it wisely? Time wasted in being angry and upset for nothing; time wasted in being a complete idiot sometimes, time wasted in making wrong decisions and then having to live with the consequences; time wasted in eating the wrong food, over-indulging in rich food, drinking yourself stupid and waking up feeling like death warmed up; time wasted ... time wasted .. time wasted ... You’ve got your own list of wasted times, your own deep regrets, and I’ve got mine. Who will redeem the time? We can’t. But God can, and he has, in and through his Son. The wonder of God’s grace is that Christ Jesus shed his blood on the cross to redeem us, to pay for our sins and buy us back for God, to buy back all the times

we've squandered. In Christ, we are set free from the past – for all the time we wasted being stupid. In Christ we live in God's new time. Every day is a new day, a new beginning. Every day through repentance and forgiveness we are born again for eternal life. As we heard in the Gospel: *the one who believes has eternal life*. Nothing can take that from us. Not even death. Death for a Christian, fearful though it is for all of us... death for a Christian is the final release from the prison time into glorious eternity with God.

So, how do we live in the time given to us? We walk as wise ones; we live wisely. Knowing that Christ has redeemed us and bought back the times we wasted, we now live wisely, making the most of our time. We live in times of multiple distractions, but we must not become distracted. Make right choices. Remember the wisdom advice in Ecclesiastes chapter three: *For everything there is a season and a time ....* Make wise choices. Don't waste your time in mad and selfish consumerism. Use your time to be kind and generous. Use your time to love your loved ones, your friends, your neighbours, your needy neighbours near and far away. Use your time to be selfless, not selfish. Don't over-indulge, flee self-indulgence. Food and drink are God's good gifts, but don't over indulge and wreck your health. Entertainment is great, but some of it isn't. Avoid immoral and filthy entertainment. Watch a bit of tele if you like, but don't waste your time watching rubbish, of which there is so much unfortunately. Be wise. Make choices. And on and on we could go ...

Paul picks on one thing in particular:  
*Don't get drunk with wine, for that is debauchery, but be filled with the Spirit.*  
Not the spirit in the bottle is what you need in abundance, but God's Holy Spirit. Without the Spirit of God, without Lady Wisdom, without the wise teaching of Jesus, we will all flounder and lose the



way. But with the Spirit, and in the Spirit, we will walk wisely, making the most of our time.

We will even make time to sing and give thanks. Not many people sing anymore. Perhaps that is because of all the entertainment: we are sung to. But Christians still sing, because we have a new song to sing. The desire to praise God in song comes from deep inside .....



And last of all, give thanks to God the Father at all times and for everything in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.

There's a whole sermon just in those words, but I'm not doing it today. Someone has said that worship is 'a royal waste of time'. In the very best sense, it is! Enjoy your royal waste of time today, and every time you turn to the Royal One, the Triune God, in worship, prayer, song, and thanksgiving. So let us give glory to God (together):

Glory to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit,  
as it was in the beginning, is now, and will be forevermore.  
Amen