

Eleventh Sunday after Pentecost

Sermon Text: Ephesians 5:15-17

Theme: “*Mind your step*”

Grace, peace and mercy to you from God our Father and our Lord and Saviour, Jesus Christ.

Each year we consider anew where God is calling us as a congregation. How does he want us to serve one another? In many cases the answer will look very similar to the last time we considered the question; and so it should. But the value of asking the question again is that it reminds us once more of the reasons why we live out our faith in the way we do.

Earlier this year we reviewed and re-wrote our mission statement to reflect a more simple understanding of how God is calling us to serve. Do you remember how it goes? “***We are called by God to shine the light of Christ, by the power of the Holy Spirit, through His Word, into the time and place God has placed us.***” We are called to shine the light of Christ – so how are we going to do this, as individuals and as a congregation?

Heavenly Father, may the words of my mouth and the meditations of our hearts be acceptable to you, O Lord, our Rock and our Redeemer. Amen.

Worldly wisdom

The readings from today all focus on the contrast between the wisdom of the world and that of God’s wisdom. The Proverbs reading takes an unusual direction from that we might ordinarily expect. The world would surely call those who are wise to embrace more wisdom. It is those who have the smarts who do the self-help courses or read the motivational books. Isn’t it those who are clever who look for that slightest edge to get further ahead? Now I’m a fan of motorsport, especially Formula One and here those who are ahead of the pack never rest on their laurels for each team is constantly improving. The increments of improvement can usually be measured only in thousandths of a second and teams will spend millions of dollars chasing these improvements. Surely wisdom would dictate they have reached a fast enough speed already, why go any faster? The wisdom of the world is always seeking to higher, faster, further. We are in a constant quest to try and improve what we are already doing.

This sounds like good advice, doesn’t it? It must be a good thing to want to improve all the time. In our quest to improve, we should stop every now and then and ask ourselves by what yardstick we are measuring our supposed improvements.

Almost anyone who was working in the late 80’s through the 90’s would have been aware of the impact of mobile phones, email and the internet on how we conduct our affairs. At this time I worked in the Army where the provision of good information was very important in making decisions that impacted on the lives of many. It occurred to me that all this technology should have been the breakthrough to making better and wiser decisions with all this extra information. What happened? We didn’t make better decisions – we just had more time to make more of the same bad decisions we always had! And surely this is duplicated in most areas of our lives.

Perhaps a more recent example is that of the new digital TV signals that are being pumped into our homes to give us a better quality of television experience. Well now, I like relaxing in front of the box as much as anyone else, but as I surf through the growing number of channels, I’m getting this nagging feeling that more of the same is not necessarily better, no matter how good it looks.

The wisdom of the world looks for more improvement in our daily lives but the problem is that yardstick is too changeable. Too often the measurement we use is, “Do I feel better about this?” We are the ones who determine whether something is worthwhile or not. In this way we are using our wisdom to decide what is best for us and in this mode we are turned in on ourselves. We are the centre of everything and this is really what stands at the bottom of worldly wisdom. I become the master of my world.

The getting of wisdom

God’s wisdom calls out to the whole world, “Whoever is simple, let them turn in here!” How’s that for a sales pitch. I can’t see that ever making it in the church growth manual! Imagine standing at the front of our church inviting those who are simple in to join us. How would people react? Would those invited say, “I’m not simple, I don’t belong here.” Maybe those in the church would say, “I’m not simple either, maybe I don’t

belong here.” It’s hard to imagine inviting people to join us because they are simple will ever amount to anything.

“Leave your simple ways and *live*, and walk in the way of insight” is how the Old Testament reading for today concludes. The invitation is given to us, to put aside our way of doing things and turn back to God’s way of doing things. The Book of Proverbs opens with “The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge; fools despise wisdom and instruction” (Prov 1:7). To fear God is not to cower before him, but it is to acknowledge that he is more powerful than anything or anyone else in the world. God created the world and everything that is in the world. He is certainly more powerful and wise than you or I. So maybe it would pay to listen to God’s Word and measure our desires against his Word for us.

It could be that following our path is not the wisest path we could choose. Humanities desire to go further, faster, higher might be better spent in shifting our attention from ourselves towards others. As Christians, this begins with us fearing the Lord, turning to him to guide us and then reaching out in love to help others.

Making best use of the time God gives us

In his letter to the Ephesians, St Paul reminds us to, “Look carefully then how you walk, not as unwise but as wise.” This is interesting because if you were going to give advice to someone as to how they should move from one place to another, wouldn’t you say, “Look where you are going”? Yet Paul says, “Look carefully *how* you walk”. The question for you then, is how are you walking? How are you travelling along life’s journey? Is all going well or do you feel like you are tripping up constantly? You see God has given us the freedom to choose *how* we walk, but God alone knows the way of the righteous (Ps 1:6). Jesus says to the world, “I am the way, the truth and the life, no one comes to the Father except through me” (Jn 14:6). The world wants to believe that all paths lead to the same God, or certainly the same good place for good people. God’s Word says there is one path that leads to God and that is through Jesus Christ.

So often I hear people asking, “What is it that God wants me to do?” People are crying out for direction and for an answer, hoping it will be one they want to hear. Perhaps the reason people struggle with understanding God’s direction for them in their lives is they don’t like the answer they are given. And so they continue struggle along their chosen path instead of accepting maybe God’s will is for them to be doing exactly what it is they are doing *now*.

And this is the key to making the best use of the time God has given to you. What is it that God is putting before you to do? It may not be what you would choose for yourself, but it may be that which needs to be done. It is for this reason I am reluctant to tell you, both as individuals and for us as a congregation, what it is that we should be doing. Instead of me telling you what to do, isn’t it better that you ask God to lead you in what it is you are now doing? And if there is to be a change of direction, isn’t it better that you pray for God to open the doors to let the change take place. And if you embark on a new direction and things don’t work out, perhaps you have let *your* plans get in the way of God’s will, then ask for God’s forgiveness and turn back to him for guidance.

This is why our congregation’s mission statement is so vague, yet so focussed on God calling us and guiding us to shine the light of Christ in the time and place he has put us. Through this statement you are acknowledging that God is the one who is guiding us and that the work we are called to do will change from time to time.

As you continue on your life’s journey, walk with confidence and boldness as you follow God’s path of righteousness which he has laid before you. But as you go, mind your step! Trust that you may not, in fact probably won’t know the final outcome or destination of your earthly work. But trust also that God knows already what will take place and that he will guide you and equip you adequately for whatever lies ahead. Your work is to believe in Jesus Christ and look carefully how you walk.

Don’t walk in worldly ways, but walk in the wisdom of God which passes all understanding, keep guard over your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.