

Rev. Seth D Bode + Sermon 280 + Thirteenth Sunday after Pentecost

"Lord God, You have appointed me as a bishop and pastor in Your Church, but You see how unsuited I am to meet so great and difficult a task. If I had lacked Your help, I would have ruined everything long ago. Therefore, I call upon you: I wish to devote my mouth and heart to you; I shall teach the people. I myself will learn and ponder diligently upon Your Word. Use me as Your instrument -- but do not forsake me, for if ever I should be on my own, I would easily wreck it all."

"Sir, we would see Jesus."

WALK CAREFULLY, WISELY, & SPIRITUALLY AT EVERY OPPORTUNITY

Second Lesson -- Ephesians 5:15-20

15 Consider carefully, then, how you walk, not as unwise people, but as wise people. 16 Make the most of your time, because the days are evil. 17 For this reason, do not be foolish, but understand what the will of the Lord is. 18 And do not get drunk on wine, which causes you to lose control. Instead, be filled with the Holy Spirit 19 by speaking to one another with psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs (singing and making music with your hearts to the Lord), 20 by always giving thanks for everything to God the Father, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.

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Church isn't the most popular place. Being popular is paradoxical. You both like and dislike what is popular. Take any school setting: The popular kids in school are both the most liked and most disliked. After school, the most popular kids have problems (establishing close relationships, satisfying romantic relationships, behaving socially risky). So do the least popular kids (more health problems than average, higher mortality rates NOT counting suicide). But what if churches looked for popularity? Would that be helpful or harmful? And what about likability in general? Is the popular place that place where you just get liked, or is it a place that satisfies our deep need to love and to be loved? There's usually trouble when churches seek only popularity.

What kinds of problems does that seem to create? Churches push forced entertainment for the numbers. Often they drag in the Holy Spirit, and they force explanations for the Holy Spirit, considering themselves spiritual, when it's not derived from what the Holy Spirit had written. Many churches that attempt popularity above all else seem to promise that the Holy Spirit is where the most excitement is discovered, where the most emotion is shared, where the most people are gathered, and where the most tears are cried.

So rather than play that game, we see in Scripture today a few things about the Holy Spirit that you might not expect,

The Unpopular Good Things Infrequently Spoken About The Holy Spirit

1. He teaches us when to stop

How unexciting that may seem to be! The context of St. Paul writing to the church in Ephesus, a church he dearly loved, as he sat under house arrest in Rome. He remembered the culture and way of life from living there two years. Certain things had stopped while Paul was there. He was given the power to stop sicknesses, so that even handkerchiefs that touched him were empowered to heal. He stopped magicians from practicing sorcery, and they burned their scrolls. He stopped some disciples who hadn't been baptized into Jesus, so they received the Holy Spirit. (See Acts 19:1-21.) So there are some exciting things about stopping.

When we refer to the Holy Spirit teaching us when to stop, we mean that God the Holy Spirit wills His people not to be simple and simply clouded in judgment. These Ephesians would have known the debauchery of the Greek world and how cult religions of Bacchus and Dionysus were basically drinking parties. Excessive behaviors had no limit, since the cult worshipers believed these ancient gods gave them powers and abilities. So Paul tells the Ephesians to "consider carefully how you walk." The word for walk can mean just live, walking around doing this or that in your life. But that is a great analogy for life, because Paul wanted these people to take the right steps, take accurate steps. So the Christian life is like a tightrope, "because the days are evil" (v. 16) and "belong to the present evil age" (Gal. 1:4). If you think you're standing firm, be careful that you don't fall. "Godliness with contentment is great gain" (1 Tim. 6:6).

And it is an underestimated fact that God wanted these Ephesians to grasp out-of-this-world information, like sin, grace, faith and works. God wanted them not only to know this, but to use and apply this knowledge in the management of their lives.

Where will this wisdom lead your steps? On the tightrope of life, where every temptation wants to make you into a fool, where will this passage today have you step? Where will this passage have you stop? Will you step into what is exciting and what's popular, or will you stop? Will you step into the crowd's influence, because that's just what people do, or will your spirit stop? Will this passage have you step you into the internet's thinking about the soul and eternity, or will those ideas and advice stop at God's Word? Will you step into a game of lying, or will you stop? Will you step into foolishness, or will you stop? Will you keep in step with the Spirit, and will you stop at a Christian friend, stop by your pastor, or stop in at church when the tightrope sways?

- Those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the sinful nature with its passions and desires. Since we live by the Spirit, let us keep in step with the Spirit. (Gal. 5:24-25)

The Spirit promises to be in a very specific place. Jesus certainly says that where two or three are gathered in His name, there He is with them. But the Holy Spirit specifies that He comes by the hearing of faith (Gal. 3:2) and that He brings life with every Word of Jesus (John 6:63). So when your steps lead you here to stop at the Word and sacraments, the Spirit has led you back to Himself. As unpopular as that may be, it's a

good thing and it's true. The Word and the sacrament, not the emotion and the excitement, is where you have promises that the Holy Spirit is present.

Now, the Word and sacrament may influence our hearts and minds and mouths to emotion and excitement. That's the next part ...

2. He offers the real Jesus song

In contrast to alcohol, the Holy Spirit wants to fill the Ephesians. He goes on to say that then there is singing -- psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs. Martin Luther said, "Music drives the devil away." So it would be either one language or the other, the language of over-drinking and excessive sins, or the language of psalms hymns, and spiritual songs.

God the Holy Spirit wills His people to speak in a language entirely different than that of this world. The word "psalm" means plucking strings, chanted songs that would be accompanied. The way that Jews used this Greek word was in reference to their Old Testament book of "Psalms," which you might call their hymnbook. The word "hymn" is straight from the Greek language, which is why it's spelled funny. These were sacred poetic compositions intended for group use, first in the Greek Doric culture. So hymns are really poetry, and that holds true today. The "songs" referred to are actually the Greek word "ode," and it was a kind of song popularized by the writer Horace. The Romans called it a carmen, and it was originally lyric poetry, but later meant generally any song. And these psalms, hymns, and odes would all be "spiritual," meaning not mystical or some popularized idea of the word. They would be from the Holy Spirit.

So today we sing songs almost always in church based on the spiritual, or what the Spirit inspired in the Bible. This extends to certain songs we don't sing in church. If our Sunday school came up to sing, "row, row, row your boat," it would be within our Christian freedom to do so. But it wouldn't be spiritual, and we wouldn't learn anything more about our walk on the tightrope of Christian life. If we had songs from any old concert or club, we would be disconnected from what the Spirit has to offer. "The Holy Spirit is better versed than the world, which believes it alone holds the deed to these arts" (J.P. Koehler). True, there are great songs out there that we all enjoy in the world around us. But when reality of the soul, of sin, of life and death strikes, "The worldling descends to his body, the Christian ascends to his spirit" (Lenski).

- Those who live according to the sinful nature have their minds set on what that nature desires; but those who live in accordance with the Spirit have their minds set on what the Spirit desires. (Romans 8:5)

Not too long ago a friend of mine in the ministry put up his playlist for church service, for the church band. There were four songs I hadn't heard before, so I checked them out online to see what I was missing. Not a single one said the name of Jesus, Christ, His Christhood, His person, His nature, His work, or His purpose. It was all our response or a self-help styling of song. I found my voice suggesting something with the name of Jesus, something about who He is and what He has done for His people. It is Jesus' greatest delight when we sing that.

- Here it says, "(singing and making music with your hearts to The Lord), by always giving thanks for everything to God the Father, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ" (19b-20).
- This is very similar to, "Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly as you teach and admonish one another with all wisdom, and as you sing psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs with gratitude in your hearts to God" (Colossians 3:16-17).

So how will you find your voice? Answer: By giving thanks for everything to God the Father, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ. His Christhood, His person, His nature, His work, His purpose was to stretch out His hands on the cross so that we would have this tightrope. He stretched out our lives in His love so that He could be a part of them, and so we wouldn't worry about popularity or status or likability with anyone. We would only concern ourselves with God's take, as unpopular as that may be. Only what Jesus says matters, and He calls you sisters and brothers. Only what God the Father says matters, and He calls you justified, forgiven, freed, spiritual, just as He has sent His Spirit into your heart. By His Spirit you have faith in the real Jesus, and that faith saves, and that faith sings.

What happens when we speak unpopular good things about the Holy Spirit? We find true Christianity; no frills, no fakery, but real spirituality. No popularity, no fickle crowd fluttering from flower to flower, from crowd to caricature of what Christianity really is. You have a whole new language, the real Jesus Christ, the wisdom where to step and stop ... Speak the unpopular good things about the Holy Spirit.