

Ephesians 5:15-20 Pastor Bill Uetrict 8/19/18 13 Pentecost

This past week my son Micah was interviewed on a podcast that he shared on Facebook. The interview was about his political views and what brought him to the conclusions he reached. For this dad, it was a remarkable interview. I couldn't have been prouder. What struck me most about the interview was how well Micah got the big picture: the big picture of his growing up years, the big picture of his parents, what drives us, the big picture of what shapes this church's view of the world. I am a guy who thrives on the big picture, and Micah is a chip off the old block, I guess.

But sometimes, Micah and I need to understand that the big picture isn't enough, as my wife will frequently remind me. Sometimes the big picture needs to give way to the details, needs to become the "so what?" Frankly, sometimes it is not until the "so what" is described that some people grasp the big picture.

In our reading from Ephesians today, we are getting part of the "so what." We're getting part of the "therefore." Now I must admit that since I am such a big picture person I get a little nervous when I find myself preaching on the details. So often preaching on the "so what" sounds so much like moralizing to me, the kind of endeavor that many people associate with preaching, unfortunately. "You need to do this. You need to do that. You better do that." And the finger begins to point when that message is being shared.

For me, preaching is not finger pointing; it's not moralizing. It's the proclamation of the good news. But Bill, if the good news doesn't become something, if it is not embodied, if it does not lead to something practical, if it doesn't answer the so-what question, then we all must wonder whether the good news *is* really good news for the fullness of our lives.

The author of Ephesians in the first three chapters in massive strokes paints the big picture, which is this: God from the very beginning has been about the business of making a divided humanity

one. It has been his plan all along to bring together Jews and Gentiles—that is, everybody. It may not have seemed like it. This plan may have seemed to be hidden. But in Christ, especially in his death on his cross, the plan for unity has been unveiled. The curtain has been drawn back. And the wisdom of God, what most of our readings today are concerned with, has appeared fully on the stage. Jesus, the wisdom of God, the living bread come down from heaven, has made us all one.

Ephesians, then, asks, “so what?” What are the implications of that big picture for the details of our lives? Or as Walter Brueggemann has put it, what are the behaviors “which sustain the gift of the new social possibility?” If the good news (God has made us all one) is going to mean something, it will inform the way we behave.

So let’s get practical. Let’s attend to the details, knowing that I get a little nervous as we do so. Again, in case you didn’t get it, and just because I like the big picture so much, God has made all one, unified all of us through Christ.

Therefore, “be careful how you live, not as unwise people, but as wise ones.” Alertness is necessary for the Christian walk. In life, it is easy to be lulled to sleep. It is easy to be dragged along by other people, by your situation, by your feelings. All of a sudden, you are someplace you didn’t mean to be. You’re punching holes in the walls. You are stomping all over the feelings of other people--after all you have *the right* to be angry. That clerk, that waitress didn’t treat you like she should have. I mean, does she have any idea how long you have been sitting there? You’re helping pay her salary.

If we want to maintain the unity that is our gift in Christ, we need to be alert. We need to be intentional. We need to be careful how we live, making the most of the time, because the days are evil.

When a lot of modern people hear the imperative to “make the most of the time” they think that means we need to fill every moment with some kind of activity, which is a temptation for me. Now I do think that “making the most of the time” does entail paying attention to what life can offer us. We do a disservice to ourselves by not

discovering the great things that a community like ours has to offer. We make our lives less than what they could be when we constantly turn down invitations, avoiding interaction with others and with what a community provides us. But making the most of the time is not about constant frenetic activity; it's about paying attention to the significance of the time. Eugene Peterson in his **Message Bible** interprets this portion of the passage this way: "Make the most of every chance you get." Make the most of the opportunities that help you live out the unity that is your gift in Christ.

These *are* evil days, which means that there are lots of people who are longing to sow seeds of discord, lots of people who specialize in tearing people apart. And by the way, for the book of Ephesians, those people often look more like insiders, like one of us, than outsiders, the folks whom we think are against us—a reality that calls us to be especially vigilant.

Since we are united in Christ, don't be foolish. Understand what the will of the Lord is. And guess what the will of the Lord is? Unity! Foolishness will lead to all kinds of efforts that tear other people down and tear apart our relationships. Now don't think that means we always have to agree with folks, that we have to put up with all kinds of junk that other folks dish out. Unity is not an invitation to be a doormat, to be walked all over. But it is an invitation to see that there is something larger than our opinions, our needs, or our feelings. There is something larger than what offends us. Foolishness trusts that there isn't. I can't get beyond this because the irritation, the anger, or the offense is the final word. It is not. The final word belongs to the God who has made us all one.

So understand what the will of the Lord is. And while you are at it, "Don't get drunk with wine. That cheapens your life." (Peterson) The problem here is not wine; it's drunkenness. Biblically, wine would be considered a great gift. Most of the ancient Jews who put together the Bible wouldn't know about teetotalling. Alcohol was considered a part of the goodness of life. We now know that for some people its

consumption can lead to an addictive disease, and, therefore, those folks shouldn't drink it all. That's an insight that ancients didn't have, but they did recognize the problems that came with drinking too much. Let's be honest. Too much drinking can sometimes lead to too much fighting. And fighting tears apart the unity that is our gift.

But more than that, too much drinking leads to a false ecstasy. And I think that ecstasy is something Ephesians believes we want to discover. The word "ecstasy" comes from a Greek word that means "outside of the self." The Christian faith clearly believes that getting outside of the self is necessary for the good life and in part connects us to God.

Honestly, modern life gives people too few chances for ecstasy. We're too rational for that kind of stuff, we believe and we say as we look down at people who get lost in their grief or their joy. But I think we are made for ecstasy, which is why I believe so many people these days get drunk. It's about the only way that they can get ecstatic. It's a way that they can get outside of themselves, get beyond the daily struggles or the daily grind. And wanting to get beyond those things is a good move, represents good intuition. We need something that takes us outside of ourselves.

But the overuse of alcohol is a false ecstasy, or at least a potentially destructive one. Those who struggle with the use of alcohol will tell you that in their disease process they had to drink more and more as time went on to get the desired effect. That's the nature of addiction processes. You always have to have more. True ecstasy doesn't demand more. If it does, it probably is a part of an addictive process. And addictive processes, by the way, can involve not only alcohol, but a whole host of things—activity, sex, pornography, religion, relationships, shopping. All of these addictions can lead to false ecstasies.

Don't live a life of getting drunk with wine, for that will ultimately disappoint. Instead, "be filled with the Spirit, as you sing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs among yourselves, singing and making

melody to the Lord in your hearts.” I don’t know if this is true or not, but I wonder if people drink more these days because they are singing less. Making music is an ecstatic experience. It takes you outside of yourself. It takes you to a high that can feed your soul. Now I know that not everybody can sing well or play an instrument, but you can participate in music making. You can give yourselves over to the rhythms and the melodies. You can share in the community’s music making. After all, music making is part of the work of the community, the work that leads to a sense of ecstasy, an encounter that takes you beyond yourself and becomes a tangible way for you to experience the unity that we all have in Christ.

Such encounters lead you, as Ephesians says, to give “thanks to God the Father at all times for everything.” Gratitude is the right posture for those who live in response to the good news. Everything is gift. The right move for people who want to behave in a way that is in keeping with the *big picture* is the move toward thankfulness. People who live with gratitude are people who make living in community much more pleasant, vibrant, and hopeful. They help us know the unity that is our gift.

You know, I suppose it’s not always about the big picture. Or the big picture is not the only picture that needs to be painted. I guess the devil is in the details. Or maybe better put, the work of the Holy Spirit, the Spirit who in Jesus brings us together, is discovered in the details, is found as the big picture becomes the practical *therefore*.