

**Eleventh Sunday after Pentecost (Proper 15) – Year B – August 19, 2009 - Homily**  
**1 Kings 2:10-12, 3:3-14; Psalm 111; Ephesians 5:15-20; John 6:51-58**  
**Susan E. Wilmot**

The African concept of *ubuntu*, most recently used at the Episcopal Church's General Convention in Anaheim fits well with our text from Ephesians this evening. Archbishop Desmond Tutu describes *ubuntu* like this, "It is to say, 'My humanity is caught up, is inextricably bound up, in yours.' We belong in a bundle of life. We say, 'A person is a person through other persons.' It is not 'I think, therefore I am.' It is rather: 'I am human because I belong. I participate. I share.'" In other words, we cannot be fully human alone – only as we engage one another. From our Baptismal covenant, we are called to seek and serve Christ in all persons, loving our neighbor as ourselves.

This little passage from Ephesians, as Judy pointed out on Sunday before she read it for us at the 10 o'clock service, is a very powerful piece of Scripture indeed. Along with the theme of the necessity of community, we have to consider carefully the difference between foolishness and wisdom, and how we use the time that God gives us, according to God's will. Interestingly, the King James translation of this passage helps us out here, especially with the first sentence. It reads as follows, "See then that ye *walk* circumspectly, not as fools, but as wise, *redeeming the time*, because the days are evil." There are a couple of important differences: one is a key word and the other a key phrase. Instead of the word "live", we have "walk", conveying the overall notion of life as a journey, one that we move through in time. The second is the phrase "making the most of the time" where we have instead, "redeeming the time". Both are accurate translations, but the Greek is so nuanced that we need both to really grasp what the writer of Ephesians is telling us here. Yes, we are to make the most of our God-given time, but how we make the most of that time is through redeeming it. It's complex, but if we understand that the greatest gift we have been given is our redemption, the gift of salvation, through Jesus' life, death and resurrection, then we start to see the close connection between offering our own lives to God's service, and therefore using our time for words and deeds that glorify God's name.

Time offers another wrinkle of complexity in the richness of this text. The word used for "time" here is *kairos*, as opposed to the Greek word, *khronos*. The latter is the word from which we take our meaning for time in words like chronological, the common linearity of time and space for the lives of all humanity. On the other hand, I have always loved the concept of *kairos*, because in essence it is more about God's timing for us. While God is outside of all time, as Ecclesiastes (Ecclesiastes 3:1) reminds us, God has defined seasons and times for all things, "For everything there is a season, and a time for every matter under heaven:" That is *kairos*. There is a hidden reminder that God is in control here, whatever we might think to the contrary! And our use of time? Again, if the days are evil, meaning that they are full of worldly distractions, we are called to use our God-given gifts to consciously work together to fill our days with God's work. The emphasis is on the mission of the church, the loving service of the Spirit-filled community that is the Body of Christ.

One question we might ask ourselves is whether we are fools for Christ, or fools for the world. Or perhaps we think of ourselves as truly wise, because no one wants to be considered foolish, right? Scripture gives us a clue here. The Book of Proverbs is full of sayings about the foolish and the wise, but Paul's letter to the church in Corinth has good advice, "Do not deceive yourselves. If you think that you are wise in this age, you should become fools so that you may become wise" (1 Corinthians 3:18). And again from Paul's letter to the Corinthians, "For since,

in the wisdom of God, the world did not know God through wisdom, God decided, through the foolishness of our proclamation, to save those who believe” (1 Corinthians 1:21). So it is good to be a fool for Christ, but not foolish in matters of discernment or in matters of wasting our opportunity to redeem the world in Christ’s name. In fact, Ephesians tells us that clothed in the wisdom of Christ we can and should discern God’s will in all things, through the power of the Holy Spirit.

There appears to be a specific prohibition here against getting drunk with wine. But you and I know all too well that this kind of self-medication, or way to avoid reality, is not the only way that the world can ensnare us. It seems highly likely that the writer of Ephesians is telling us that, as Christians, we are truly empowered to take life as it comes, living in the moment, always trusting in God, and leaning on our faith first and foremost. Whereas, being drunk is essentially like walking through the world off-balance and unfocused. After all, isn’t that the way that alcohol or other drugs make us feel, as well as distort how we see the world through a haze of unreality? The true reality that is God’s kingdom is available to us at all times. The writer suggests that the church, filled with the Holy Spirit is a model for God’s kingdom and grace. And it is entirely fair for us to ask what the Spirit-filled church looks like in faith and in action. Knowing all that we do about Jesus’ life we already know that faith in action looks like intentional spiritual practices, doing the work God has given us to do, discerning and obeying God’s will, and devoting ourselves to worship. What about today’s church?

We return then to community. We know God and Christ only in and through the community that is the Body of Christ, and the communities of faith in which we gather for worship, and to share our gifts. This portion of the letter to the church in Ephesus emphasizes the urgency of the church’s mission in and to the world. We cannot afford to miss any window of opportunity, because each moment in time, each day offers us another way to transform the world, by shifting thoughts and focus towards God, lifting the veil of distraction, and revealing more of God’s love, to the glory of His name. The Spirit-filled church looks like the people who are the Body of Christ gathering in worship, drawing close to God, so that God may draw closer to each of us. It looks like you and me being strengthened through the sacrament of Holy Communion, and by the encouragement of our brothers and sisters in Christ, going out and do the work God has given us to do. The church is men, women and children of faith, giving freely of their god-given gifts at every opportunity, serving the Lord with gladness, and building up the Body of Christ. The Body is also a voice of thanksgiving to God in good times and hard times, a voice that is completely countercultural. You and I are to be voices of gratitude, praising our Lord, in a world full of victims and blame, full of sorrow and shame, greed and backbiting.

A final thought from Archbishop Tutu, “A person with *ubuntu* is open and available to others, affirming of others, .... For he or she has a proper self-assurance that comes from knowing that he or she belongs in a greater whole and is diminished when others are humiliated or diminished,... or treated as if they were less than they are.” And so, “Be careful how you live, not as unwise people, but as wise, making the most of the time.”

Amen.