

“Live Wisely”

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Our Ephesians passage starts out with “the days are evil” the writer seems to simply accept that the days are evil. And he doesn’t go on to elaborate how they are evil or complain that evil days exist. The focus seems to be on what they should do. I wonder if our gospel lesson describes at least one way that the days are evil. As we read that passage some of us find it a shocking kind of passage. If we recognize that Jesus has just talked about what defiles, what comes out of one’s heart, I wonder (and I’ve heard at least one sermon on this), that what Jesus was doing was testing his disciples. Testing them to see if they might speak up.

As he has this conversation with the gentile, this Syrophoenician woman, this one that was considered “other” by the Jewish folk. In fact I understand there was a hatred between the people of Tyre and the people of Judea, the Jews, and those of Tyre. And so what Jesus says is not out of character for a Jewish person to say. And as we see Jesus speaking those words perhaps he is demonstrating the very evil of his day. How divided they are. It’s no wonder Rome was able to come in. People of Tyre and the Judeans couldn’t work together, couldn’t put up a joint front, those ancient battle scars are there. and they don’t want them crossed. And the disciples are silent, and we see no sign they recognize how discordant this is with what Jesus has just taught them about what comes out of the heart defiles.

The evil of human division was rampant in Jesus’ time, and we see hatred growing because of it. What about in our times? Do we still see those kinds of things? Well one of the discussions of Afghanistan is that the reason it struggles so much is because of those very things. The factions and tribes that are fighting one another. In fact my understanding is that the Taliban would like to completely eliminate one of those, basically a genocide of one of those tribes. While this does not describe the tragedy, it does demonstrate that these divisions are still with us, at least in Afghanistan. What about with us in our context? Is that ancient evil of division still with us? We have systemic racism in our system and in our thinking, don’t we? We often blame our problems on people who have a lineage different than our own. Look at the rise in violence against Asian-Americans. And then there is the fear and hatred that’s focused on the migrant from south of the border. Jesus states that in his statement, that division, that way we separate ourselves into tribes that dismiss, degrade, and deny the others humanity.

Ephesians invites us not to be foolish but wise. And where do we look? It reminds me of when we sometimes do children’s sermons when ever we ask a question it feels like the children guess that the answer is Jesus, and so often that is the first answer to any question. And perhaps they are not that far off. For again, it feels to me that when we are looking to be wise rather than foolish, where do we look? We look to Jesus. And we have to read this whole passage to see the wisdom of Jesus, for Jesus is able to not only recognize the divisions, but see beyond them. To see a woman coming who is in need. Who comes in spite of those divisions, the degradation and dismissal that happens because of them? He is able to listen. So as we ask “what does it mean to leave foolishness behind and to be wise , do we

look to what Jesus does, we see Jesus seeing beyond, being able to be open and listen, hearing that faith, and responding with the care, the very love of God, that brings healing.

Then in Ephesians we are asked to see. To see disciples who disgracefully stand silently by, and to see in the woman a positive example. The woman who sees in Jesus the one in whom she can trust, can even argue for what is right, can be persistent in knowing that God's love will prevail. She is the one able to come and bring the need of the more vulnerable one, her daughter, her child. We see in both of them the opportunities to become wise, wise in being able to see beyond their divisions and wise in seeing that a persistent, trusting faith engages with God and God's work.

Ephesians invites us to see God's will, to search it out, and as we look at Jesus we begin to see that will at work. A will that responds to faith and persistence and right relationships, a faith that brings healing to a child. I sometimes wonder, if one way of looking at how and whether God is at work or not, is to see what's happening with the children. Are children healed or not? Jesus heard the mothers cry for the child's cry. I wonder if we have heard the parents cry for the children's cry in our world. It feels like we have had years at our border where we have children in pain and suffering, and we haven't solved that need.

As Ephesians goes on it invites us to recognize that some ways we need to alter our reality, see things more clearly. Not with the spirits that will dull our view of reality, but to be filled with the Holy Spirit so that we might begin to embody wisdom, that is, to get insight and comprehension in our own context and God's righteous will.

It's interesting the things that Ephesians goes on to talk about, it's about singing together, it's an invitation to being harmonious, to looking at how caring about God's will lead us to engage in an activity in which we work together. An activity that takes cooperation. The harmony, the song that comes emerges elicits thanks that we can bring to the One that truly does begin to engage us in wisdom. This may awaken the awe God deserves, and may open us further to the will of the Lord.

As our Ephesians passage reminds us, we need to understand God's will. As we read and listen and see what Jesus does and attend to what Ephesians invites us to remember, and how the Psalm invites us to be present, we may also grow our trust/faith, and look with persistence at how God will heal. And perhaps particularly we can see God at work in healing the children. Yet, these passages leave us with some challenging questions: How have we addressed the plight of children and shown compassion to their parents' cry. How do we put together our view and comprehension of the world? Do we let Jesus teach us what is evil? How do we respond to our divisions, our degradation, or dismissal of each other? Do we open ourselves to be filled by the Spirit even if the Spirit will change us and give us new eyes with which to see, and new ears with which to hear? Can we learn to live as wise disciples, even when the days are evil? Can we be filled with the Spirit so that we are not foolish but understanding the will of God? Do we start in awe of God, and find God leads us into harmony? Can we come giving thanks to God at all times, and come with a humble persistent righteous faith that gets children healed? Can we live wisely? Amen