

Being the Church at Brentwood

Opportunities

Ps 111 & Ephesians 5:15-20

August 19, 2012

472, 428, 764 (sung to #96), 775

What struck me in preparing this sermon was the word that the Good News Bible translates *opportunities*.

What are the *opportunities* that God is inviting us to pay attention to in this passage?

What are the opportunities that we enjoy to flourish in the grace of Jesus Christ?

What responses to those *opportunities* is faithful in the light of God's redemptive work in Jesus Christ?

When I checked the meaning of the Greek work that the Good News Bible translates as *opportunities*, my thinking about the focus of this sermon shifted. In English, *opportunities* are favourable times or occasions, situations or conditions that are favourable to attaining a goal, good positions or prospects for improvement.

In New Testament Greek, the word used here is a derivative of *exagorazo*. Literally, this family of words means 'to buy in the market'.

Here, it means to our redemption, specifically, that we are redeemed by Christ's forgiveness.

It is the act by which God brings us back home, back into fellowship with him by faith.

We are literally 'bought up' by God to make the most of the time we are in.

So, the compiler of this collection of early Christian texts, deeply rooted in the teachings of Paul, is telling us that wisdom – *sophia* – is an opportunity to see and approach things differently, to see and approach things in the light of God's redemption in Jesus Christ.

We are again, as was originally intended,
the beloved children and friends of God.
We have been enfolded into the community of God and his people,
called from the time of creation to take good care of the earth,
to be a blessing in everything that we are and do,
to love God, our neighbours, and ourselves
in order to be a part of God's mission in the world.

That is the wisdom we witness to as the Christian church.

Through God's steadfast and persistent love,
because of his desire to redeem his beloved human beings,
we enjoy again the *opportunities* to care for and bless this earth.

God's grace in Jesus Christ
makes this time for us favourable and opportune.
We are given, afresh every day, opportunities to flourish.

So, as I explored the various nuances
of the words *opportunities* and *wisdom* in this passage,
it seemed clear that the writer is encouraging all of us
to pay attention to the situations
in which we can witness to God's love in Jesus Christ
and its impact in an indifferent or hostile environment.

That's the clear contrast the writer poses –
this wisdom against evil.
If we ignore or turn against God's offer of loving reconciliation in Jesus Christ,
we contribute to the evil of fear and hatred in our world.

It's that blunt and clear.
Choose death or choose life.
That's the decision presented to us
every time we gather together in worship
to sing psalms and hymns and sacred songs
in gratitude for the grace that we have been offered in Jesus Christ.
Out of that gratitude, we decide to live our redeemed lives
as a witness to the opportunities provided by the wisdom of God.

And what are those opportunities?
What does God's redemption make possible
through our reconciliation with our divine source?

They are the opportunities, the wisdom,
of being filled with the Spirit.

They are the opportunities, the wisdom,
of living lives that express the gifts of the Spirit daily –
love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness,
faithfulness, humility, and self-control.

To be guided by these attitudes,
to find and take up opportunities to live in these ways,
to offer these gifts to others in gratitude for receiving them ourselves –
that is what living in the light of the Kingdom of God is all about.
That is the light we sing about every Sunday as we light the Christ candle.
That is the Spirit that is in our air as we go about our daily lives,
witnessing moment by moment to God's redemption in Jesus Christ.

Such witnessing is not easy in our contemporary society.
As for the churches among whom this circular letter was distributed,
we too are surrounded by opportunities to make different choices,
choices that deny our dignity and worth as God's beloved children and friends.
We can self-medicate and escape through substance abuse.
We can treat others with contempt or dismissal.
We can become wrapped up in our own righteousness and rightness.

So, I truly believe that the Holy Spirit is constantly presenting us
with opportunities to witness to what God has done for us and the whole creation
in Jesus Christ.

We are surrounded by opportunities to *be* God's love in our communities –
in our families, at work, at play.

In taking up those opportunities, with the continual support of the Holy Spirit,
we are living in and being the light of Christ
in a darkening world.

In taking up those opportunities, with the continual support of the Holy Spirit,
we are, as we sing each Sunday, finding the light to guide us into ways
of blessings friends and strangers we meet throughout our days.

And may we be filled with God's great love in this revealing space
and flourish by the Spirit's power in his abiding grace.

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