

Darkness – A little boy was afraid of the dark. One night his mother told him to go out to the back porch and bring her the broom. The little boy turned to his mother and said, “Mama, I don’t want to go out there. It’s dark.”

The mother smiled reassuringly at her son. “You don’t have to be afraid of the dark.” She explained. “Jesus is out here. He’ll look after you and protect you.”

The little boy looked at his mother real hard and asked, “Are you sure he’s out here?”

“Yes, I’m sure. He is everywhere, and he is always ready to help you when you need him,” she said.

The little boy thought about that for a minute and then went to the back door and cracked it a little.

Peering out into the darkness, he called, “Jesus? If you’re out there, would you please hand me the broom?”

Read Scripture – Ephesians 5:15-20

Anybody read William Shakespeare recently? Of course not! Shakespeare’s difficult to read. We might struggle with his style of writing, the “betwixt’s, ‘twain’s, ‘twill’s, “prithee” and such. I recently read *King Lear* for the first time. *King Lear* is considered Shakespeare’s greatest masterpiece but his most complicated. Kind of like reading the King James Version of the Bible. Beware though, ***King Lear* is dark**. It’s about Betrayal, Lust and Murder. It’s about

“ingratitude.” Darkness shadows the characters in *King Lear* because of their ungratefulness. I believe the Israelites were accused of the same. Near the end of the play, Kent who is King Lear’s most steadfast supporter, says, “All’s cheerless, dark, and deadly.”

Almost sounds like the current state of affairs of this world.

In *King Lear*, terrible things happen. It is the “poor naked wretches” of the world, as Lear calls them, who somehow survive in spirit; and the rich and powerful, who are finally brought down by their own power. It is the madmen and fools who turn out to be wise; and the wise and worldly who turn out to be fools.

King Lear wants to divide his kingdom amongst his three daughters. God wants to give us his Kingdom of love, grace and abundance. But the scheming against one another soon begins. King Lear’s two eldest daughters rebelled against their father while plotting against their younger sister. The Israelites made graven images and bowed before other gods.

Foolish old Gloucester has his eyes put out but then suddenly, for the first time, sees the truth about himself and his two sons; Edgar and Edmund; one legitimate, one not. One good, one not. Mad old King Lear loses his crown and his kingdom, but at the last becomes for the first time truly a king. The evil of the bad sisters is unmasked at last and they die. The purity of the good sister shines out in all its splendor. But then catastrophe occurs, and, in the last act, the good and the

bad, the wise and the foolish, the weak and the strong, all die alike, and the stage is so littered with corpses that there is nobody much left except Edgar to bring the curtain down as best he can. Edgar says, “The weight of this sad time we must obey. Speak what we feel, not what we ought to say.” What’s your gut want to say about the weight of our times?

Perhaps Shakespeare could have written a happy ending. **He didn’t!** Perhaps we can avoid all that is cheerless, dark and deadly in this world. **We can’t! The dark is not inviting, unless you’re an astronomer.** What Shakespeare wrote was in the deepest sense what he truly felt. He looked into the dark heart of things, and told as close to the whole truth as he was able.

Truth-telling is what Shakespeare was after. As much as it hurt to tell the very secrets of the dark heart of things, Shakespeare attempted to tell us the truth about human sin in *King Lear*. Where are the truth-tellers in our day? Truth-telling is what we find in the Apostle Paul’s writings, “Be very careful, then, how you live –not as unwise but as wise...because the days are evil...therefore, do not be foolish.”

There’s much **evil** in *King Lear* and in our world; evil puts pressure on our faith; requires us to be cautious. Yet, I believe we’d rather move away from **evil and darkness** and towards the light. I believe that’s the basic message of Ephesians – that although we have mystery about God’s saving plan through Jesus

Christ, we are still called to praise and thank God for the plan of salvation. And we are encouraged by this letter to persevere in our **social and personal** dimensions of our lives.

The plan of salvation unites us with Christ; we become new creations and are better equipped to handle evil and darkness. Although Shakespeare exposed the darkness surrounding King Lear, we'd prefer to keep any darkness in our lives private! It's very personal! We keep silent. Even the very best of us can be deceived by evil and darkness. So, how do we go from keeping dark secrets in silence to singing songs and being thankful, because that's a big chasm to hurdle?

Happiness is intensely personal, but it is not private. Life events bring us happiness: birth of a child, a new job, a wedding, graduation from school, a family homecoming, or retirement. They are significant moments in one's life that stand out. They may be unexpected opportunities or critical turning points in one's life. We tell others we're happy by how we act; we hum a little tune, whistle while we work, or sing songs.

It's seems rather incongruous that this passage speaks of being careful, watching out for evil, don't live foolishly; instead SING! "Sing psalms, hymns and spiritual songs." But I struggle to imagine the Apostle singing; this is the same Apostle that had early Christians stoned to death. Oh, imagine him singing,

"Just whistle while you work,

Put on that grin and start right in to whistle loud and long.

Just hum a merry tune,

Just do your best and take a rest and sing yourself a song.”

That seems inconceivable!

No one has accused me of being wise when I sing, maybe foolish, certainly happy! Happiness is very personal but it's not private!

We sing when our lives are going well; when we feel good and at peace. Music swells within us. I don't know if the Apostle was happy, but I know he was hopeful, for he wrote about our hope in Christ throughout his letters. **Being hopeful** is intensely personal, but it is not private. Our hopefulness shows up in how we live and treat others; in our behaviors and attitudes. Being hopeful is publicly expressed when we sing songs and give thanks for everything. But again, I struggle to imagine the Apostle singing,

“Zip-a-dee-doo-dah, zip-a-dee-ay

My, oh my what a wonderful day!

Plenty of sunshine heading my way

Zip-a-dee-doo-dah, zip-a-dee-ay.” **Inconceivable!**

But I do know the Apostle always praised God through Jesus Christ. **Praise** is intensely personal, but not private. Praise involves the whole person and the

whole community. It is the essence of being grateful. We are called to offer praise publicly to God by the gathered community of God's people.

It can be rather grating to our peace of mind when someone is so happy, so contented, so hopeful, upbeat and positive, praising God all the time so that they are always smiling, humming a tune, whistling or singing some song when we feel the opposite. We begin to wonder if they are in their right mind. How can they be so happy? I know them. I know what they've been through. Why are they so happy and hopeful? There must be something wrong with them!

Have we lost our innate ability to sing and be joyful?

Wouldn't it be nice if we could find a place in the Bible that said we should sing and make melody to the Lord? Here it is! Is this the Lord's will that the author alludes to in our passage? God wants us to be saved, be filled with the Spirit, not alcohol or some other substance, and then, sing, sing, sing. Give praise and thanks and stay away from the darkness and make the most of every opportunity.

Music is the language of our souls. Singing, whistling, humming, all these speak to our personal dimensions, our feelings, and our sense of who I am in this world. When we feel good – we sing. When we feel grateful – we hum. When we feel at peace – we whistle. Listening to music, making music and singing can bring us healing too!

The letter to the Ephesians calls the community, you and me, to be filled with the Spirit – as we sing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs among ourselves. We are called to sing and let God’s spirit fill us – to sing, be hopeful and learn God’s will for us. It is intensely personal but not private. When we sing we are demonstrating our thankfulness, our gratefulness, our hopefulness and yes, our happiness. We’re happy because God doesn’t reject us; God is with us.

Our scripture today tells us to be careful in how we live (also could be translated as, how we walk). Be careful! Be wise. And being wise is using our time appropriately – making the most of our time or opportunity. Of course, here’s a problem for us in the 21st century...we go to great lengths to protect our free time. We dislike interruptions, distractions, inconveniences, time-wasters... things that creep into our personal lives, and make us feel as if we’ve given up something of ourselves; our thoughts, our own peace of mind to something we weren’t ready to hear or embrace.

God calls us to make the most of our time; be steadfast in your work and life but always sing and be thankful for what God has done in your life. Wisdom is then, understanding God’s will for you and yielding yourself to God’s claim upon your life. Singing, praising God and giving thanksgiving to the Lord is a wonderful way to glorify God. Amen.