

“Making the Most of Every Opportunity”

Ephesians 5:15-20

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Some of you may recognize the name Kyle MacDonald as the ultimate “Horse Trader.” We remember him as the person who traded a red paper clip for a house. Yes, that’s right!

How did this happen? Well Kyle didn’t have a job, but one day he was looking at a red paper clip on his desk and the idea came to him to try and trade that paper clip for something of greater value. In the process he established the website Craigslist. His only requirement was that he had to trade up.

Here are some things that were a part of that trading story:

-a pair of women traded him a pen that looked like a fish;

-next was a handmade doorknob;

-a camp stove;

-a 100-watt generator

-there was a Ski-doo snowmobile in there somewhere;

-and a snow globe depicting the rock group KISS;

Now is when it gets interesting— he trades this snow globe to Corbin Bernsen for a paid role in the movie *Donna on Demand*. Why? Because Bernsen has one of the biggest snow globe collections on earth - over 6500 snow globes.

So Kyle takes the role in the movie and exchanged it to the town of Kipling, Saskatchewan for a farmhouse. The town, in turn, held a competition for the movie role. But listen to this. Kyle owns a farm house that is now for sale. Beside the “For Sale” sign in the front yard is this great big - red paper clip!

Think of this now in reflection on Paul’s words in the scripture lesson for today when he writes, . . .[make] the most of every opportunity. . .” Let’s read that scripture - Ephesians 5:15-20.

Reflecting on the events of the not too distant past, I have a hunch most of us are open to the idea of finding opportunities. Listen again to Paul’s words - vs 15-17.

So how do we make the most of every opportunity, and at the same time being cautious so as to not make a huge mistake? While seeking to understand the Lord’s will?

Let’s first recognize God’s will is for us to have an abundant life. This abundant life would consist of both physical and the spiritual. It is God’s will that each of us have a rich, rewarding relationship with God and with other people. When we work on this part of our life it will provide us with passionate spirituality. We will have a relationship with God that we can willingly and openly talk about with others. We will be able to speak with a sense of passion from our experience and a desire for others to have this abundant relationship as well. This is part of what the church health team will be challenging us to look at and deal with in this coming year. It is really a giftedness that God wants each of us to know and experience.

Another part of this abundance that God wants for each of us is to have our material needs met. Notice we are talking about “needs” here and not “wants.” This is what is behind Jesus’ teaching us, “Give us this day our daily bread. . .” God created us to have healthy bodies and good minds. God not only wants, but God provided us with the ability to take advantage of every good opportunity. Methodism’s founder John Wesley picked up on this and talked and wrote a great deal about our need to use our God given minds and bodies to make right decisions and to think theologically.

Then comes those **times when we are our own worst enemy**. This is the second thing we need to notice. So often we sabotage ourselves. And it is at these points when we learn what sin is about. We know what it is to not make the wisest choices. Paul would remind us to be careful. . .how we live—“not as unwise but as wise. . .” And then he has to get personal and say something about “living foolishly.” Those times when we make unwise plans, bad decisions, and poor investments and we mess up God’s will for our lives – spiritually, relationally and materially.

It is here that Paul would suggest that we keep a clear head. In retrospect, we know that. We know we do our best when we listen for God’s direction along with using our own minds. Paul writes, “Do not get drunk on wine, which leads to debauchery. Instead, be filled with the Spirit.” (God’s Spirit) Yes, there are those addictions that are destroying people’s lives and their ability to have abundant life.

There is something about modern life that seems to encourage additions of all sorts. Some more subtle than others. A while back Dateline NBC carried reports on the effects of gambling addiction. One of them focused on the vulnerability of women to video poker machines located in places women are likely to frequent and how the gambling industry takes advantage of it.

Our culture has a way of feeding these addictions. With people addicted to pornography, shopping, the computer, snack foods, alcohol, illegal and prescription drugs, and the list goes on. With it goes the heartbreaking stories of how families and lives are destroyed while our desire to “feel good” overtakes our ability to think and reason. Addiction becomes an impediment to our being all that God has created us to be. These are the times when we need to ask God to bring guidance into our life.

Here is the good news! Paul says, “. . .but, be filled with the Spirit.” How? He goes on, “. . .as you sing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs among yourselves, singing and making melody to the Lord . . .” This is wonderful advice! To make music in your heart to the Lord. All of us like to be around people who are always positive, always joyful, always brightening up the space, don’t we?

Rev. Douglas Meyer tells about a man who claimed to be the most accurate fortuneteller in the world. A man once came to this fortuneteller and said he had only one real question about his future and that was, “How will my life end?”

The fortuneteller gazed into the crystal ball and then announced, “Your life will end when you die.” No wonder he was so accurate.

The man nodded and then said, “Yes, but will I be happy?”

“Ah,” said the fortuneteller, “that has nothing to do with the future but what you do in the present.” (<http://www.holyspirit-elca.org/SERMONS/2003>)

Yes, he was right. God’s will for us is to choose to be happy today and everyday, to believe the Gospel, cherish the truth that in all things God is with us and that we can, with God’s direction, be victorious in any situation. That is not a guarantee that we will not have difficult times. Rather, it means we will not let our circumstances determine how we look at life. But, we will let our faith determine how we see our circumstances.

It has to do with attitude. Charles Swindoll in his book, *Strengthening Your Grip*, has this to say about the effect of a positive attitude. “The longer I live, the more I realize the impact of attitude on life. Attitude, to me, is more important than facts. It is more important than the past, than education, than money, than circumstances, than failures, than successes, than what other people think or say or do. It is more important than appearance, giftedness or skill. It will make or break a company. . . a church. . . a home. The remarkable thing is we have a choice every day regarding the attitude we will embrace for that day. We cannot change our past. . . we cannot change the fact that people will act in a certain way. We cannot change the inevitable. The only thing we can do is play on the one string we have and that is our attitude. . . I am convinced that life is 10% what happens to me and 90% how I react to it. And so it is with you. . . we are in charge of our attitudes.” (Cited by Dr. Mickey Anders, [http://www.pikevillefirstchristianchurch.org/Sermons/Sermo\\_n19990919.html](http://www.pikevillefirstchristianchurch.org/Sermons/Sermo_n19990919.html))

To make the most of every opportunity, we need to keep a clear head and we need to keep a positive spirit. There is one thing more that Paul wants us to see: “. . . **always giving thanks to God the Father for everything**. . .” This is where it all culminates - to have a positive spirit - is to always give God thanks! I’ve said it before, I say it again because it is such a critical truth - the happiest people in the world are those who have an attitude of gratitude. When we thank God for everything that comes our way is the best antidote in the world to the self-defeating attitude that so many people have that the world owes them success and happiness and the good things of life. My friends, the world owes us nothing. For us as Christians, we serve a gracious God who will pour out blessings on us if we open ourselves up to God. As we started - develop that loving relationship with God and we will be able to experience and see the blessings of our life.

Here is Paul’s directive in one sentence: Make the most of every opportunity. Keep a clear head and a positive spirit. And in all things, give God thanks!

And God’s people said, “AMEN.”