

Making the most

19 8 12

O God, you declare your mighty power
most chiefly in showing mercy and pity:
mercifully grant to us such a measure of your grace,
that we, running the way of your commandments,
may receive your gracious promises,
and be made partakers of your heavenly treasure.

Our text is taken from today's epistle to the Ephesians chapter 5 and verse 15:

'Be careful then how you live . . . making the most of the time.'

It's good to be back in the pulpit again. Over the last three Sundays, I have valued and appreciated the kindness of Keith Mears, Simon Barnes and Phil Burgess in being prepared to share their understanding of God's word and will for us in this place at this time. But it's great to be able to preach again.

We have just enjoyed a fortnight of the 30th Olympic Games of the modern era and it is curious to note the phrase used in today's collect for the Eleventh Sunday after Trinity – 'running the way of your commandments' – not so much a sprint or a marathon but more a way of life at a pace informed by the principles and precepts of God's will for us. So this morning let's turn to our reading from Paul's letter to the Ephesians and to my text, **'Be careful then how you live . . . making the most of the time'**, to see how best to do so.

Our text today offers us an instruction that we can choose to follow or not. We are advised to be careful how we live our lives; to be careful what we do and what we don't do; to be careful that in all we do we don't waste the time we have. It's good advice. We all know, whether we like it or not, that each one of us has only so much time to live – only none of us knows just how long. So there is a real sense of urgency that we should get our act together and not waste the precious opportunities we've been given.

But how should we make the best of our time ? In the five verses that follow our text, St Paul gives us three pieces of advice. Let me highlight them in reverse order.

The first is in verse 20: **to give thanks 'to God the Father at all times and for everything'**. Great advice. Be grateful. Be grateful not just for the good things, for the nice things but grateful for the nasty things that happen too. I know it sounds odd, sounds mad even, but honestly good can come out of what is bad, unpleasant, uncomfortable – it's a question of seeing things in perspective. When I was four-and-half-years-old, playing in the garden with my brother, I lost my left eye in an accident. Not good but very good in the sense that I wouldn't be who I am or where I am had that not happened to me.

Secondly, in verse 18 Paul writes **'be filled with the Spirit'**. Great advice: to be informed, enthused, encouraged by the Holy Spirit in us. As Christians, we all are promised the fruit and the gifts of the Holy Spirit – nine of one and seven of the other – in and to differing degrees. The Holy Spirit in us and alongside us is a

promise of our baptism and a fact of being a Christian. Just how much he is active in our lives is a question of how much we are prepared to listen to him and to act on his promptings – as ever the choice is ours.

Thirdly in verse 17: **‘to understand what the will of the Lord is’**. Orthodox Jews spend a life-time studying Torah and trying to put its 613 mitzvahs into practice in their lives. Paul as a young man studied the Law under Rabbi Gamaliel in Jerusalem so it should come as no surprise that here Paul is recommending that each one of us should be aware of the Christian principles which embody and express what God’s will is for us and which in turn should shape our lives. When asked to summarise them, Jesus simply said that we should love God and love our neighbour even as we love ourselves. God’s will for us then may best be summarised by this trinity of love.

So in this time after Olympic Games, our challenge and target could be what Paul sets us in Ephesians: **to be careful how we live making the most of our time**. And we can do so in three ways: **by being thankful; by being filled with the Spirit; and by understanding God’s will for us**.

I have spoken in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit,
Amen.

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H: Sermon 26 : Making the most

