

Twentieth Sunday after Trinity 2021
DCS Synod 1

Good morning everyone! Welcome to Mason, Greater Cincinnati and Trinity Church. It is wonderful to be together...the “changes and chances of this mortal life” have certainly had a dizzying effect upon our world and upon the church over the past 18 months! Things beyond our control are never beyond our Lord’s, and are all part of His great salvation masterpiece currently being painted on the canvas of history. I must say, that while our diocese and churches have felt the shaking of the past year and a half, I think we have kept our wits about us and moved ahead...there are many good and encouraging things in the pipeline, and we will hear about those during our synod presentations.

Our epistle lesson this morning is taken from St. Paul’s letter to the new Gentile churches around the region of Ephesus. Up to this point in the letter, St. Paul had been setting the new churches and believers within this big picture...God’s salvation masterpiece portraying Jesus bringing together a worldwide family of His followers through the preaching of the apostles and the work of the Holy Spirit in the earth. St. Paul assured these new Christians...and his words continue to assure us today as well...that bringing together this worldwide

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family of Jesus' followers is indeed central to God's intention and will...and therefore a guarantee that it will be accomplished.

This great undertaking and move of the Holy Spirit is ongoing, and each generation of Christians is called to find their place within the outworking of this glorious miracle. Ignoring it or being unaware of it only causes those in such a state of ignorance or denial to live their lives in accordance with the many other narratives floating around out there...causes them to build their lives upon a faulty foundation.

Every so often a news piece appears describing an elderly person parachuting from a plane on his/her 90-100 birthday! The senior thrill-seeker is attached with some kind of contraption to an experienced parachutist who controls the jump, and as the two connected bodies drift toward the earth, the 90-100 year old passenger is overwhelmed by the breathtaking view. Despite living into their 90th-100th year, the old timer has never seen anything like it, and will certainly never look at the world in the same way again since beholding his/her world from such a perspective.

Reading the first chapters of St. Paul's letter to the churches around Ephesus is meant to be a little like that...like strapping our-

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selves to the Apostle, jumping out of an airplane, and allowing him to direct us in such a way as to see the world as he had come to see it... to see the world as St Paul had come to see it as a result of his unique life, calling, and personal encounter/interaction with Jesus risen from the dead.

This morning's lesson comes after St. Paul has led us in beholding the glorious vision and perspective and coming to what we hope is a soft landing! As we drift to earth attached to the apostle...the glorious vision and perspective spread out before us...the critically important moment occurs: St Paul pulls the chord deploying the parachute and bringing us safely back to earth. The view is fantastic, we will never be the same once we've seen it, but now it's time to live our life back on earth forever changed and affected by the glorious things we have seen.

Jesus is in the process of bringing together a worldwide family of His followers who will eventually live with Him for all eternity...we've seen the spectacular vision...and in this morning's lesson, St Paul brings us back to earth...I'll read a few prior verses for context:

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So...so, because of this great and glorious life-changing view... because you now understand that **Jesus is bringing together a worldwide family of His followers who will eventually live with Him for all eternity...*don't get involved in the works of darkness, which all come to nothing, instead expose them! The things they do in secret, you see, are shameful even to talk about. But everything becomes visible when it's exposed to the light, since everything that is visible is light.***

Light and darkness...darkness and light...don't be fooled, learn the difference between works which originate and will keep you in darkness and works which originate and will keep you in light. There are works which will keep you within and a part of God's glorious purpose, and works which will only cause you to come crashing to the ground. Learn the difference!

And so he continues: *That's why it says: "Wake up, you sleeper! **Rise...up...from...the...dead! The Messiah...the Messiah will shine on you!"***

This was most likely an early Christian hymn or poem that was circulating among the church members, and for St. Paul it described

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the reality of what was happening: through the preaching of the Gospel and the work of the Spirit, **men were rising from the dead to a new life in Jesus the Messiah not in some other-worldly place but right there and then.**

“Wake up to the greatness of what God has accomplished and is still accomplishing through Jesus the Messiah, and rise up to share a part in it. Wake up, rise up, get ahold of this bird’s eye view of what God has accomplished through Jesus, and be determined to have a share in it!

So...he continues...*take special care* as to how you conduct yourselves.

“You mean my conduct matters, St. Paul?”

Being a part of this worldwide family St Paul is describing, is not primarily theoretical but primarily practical and personal...and yes, our conduct matters! Remember Galatians from a few weeks ago: *Circumcision is nothing and uncircumcision is nothing. What matters is new creation!* What matters is approaching life and living life in a new way, a way...informed and directed by Jesus, His Kingdom and His great work of salvation.

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And Paul goes on: *Don't be unwise...but be wise* (another version of the light...darkness theme). *Make use of every opportunity you have, because these are wicked times we live in.*

We shouldn't be surprised when wickedness of differing sorts wreaks havoc upon our world and troubles our lives. "My eyes shed streams of tears because men keep not thy law;" the psalmist's lament as he beheld the wickedness of his day.

It's painful to watch the antics and ambitions of sinful men bear their awful fruit all around us...and it's important to remember that sin, demons and the forces of darkness certainly still hold some power and sway in this present age. These demonic forces will all eventually be swallowed up by Christ's victory as St. Paul's glorious view is realized and completed, but for now and to varying degrees, *these are wicked times we live in.*

Chrysotom, commenting on this statement wrote: *When Paul says 'the days are evil,' he does not mean they are created evil or that they are by their very nature evil. **Rather, he says this of the troubling events that occur in time.** We are in the habit of saying, 'I have had a terrible day.'* *But that does not imply that the day of itself*

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is intrinsically terrible. Rather it refers to what has occurred in that day.

The beloved church father made an important distinction. The days are **not** created evil, just as saying “I have had a terrible day” does **not** imply that the day of itself is intrinsically terrible. Rather it is the “goings-on”...those “troubling events occurring in time” **that color the days with evil.**

And St Paul continues...*these are wicked times we live in...so don't be foolish; rather understand what the Lord's will is.* (Right here this morning, you are getting a bird's eye view of just that!) *And don't get drunk with wine; that is the way of excess and dissipation. Rather, be filled with the spirit! Speak to each other in psalms, hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody in your heart to the Lord, always giving thanks for everything to God the Father in the name of the Lord Jesus the Messiah.*

The view we experience as we drift toward earth attached to the beloved apostle and reading his letters, makes us want to sing! The magnificent vision of God's great love for us and of His great work of salvation: ***puts a new song in our mouths...songs of praise to our***

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God (as the psalmist described it). Psalms, hymns, spiritual songs are all about relating to life in the light of that breathtaking view...all about seeing and experiencing that great love of God lavished upon men everywhere. It's when we forget the view of God's salvation at work in the earth that all the wrong impulses of life begin to have their way in our lives and world.

These are evil times we live in...so don't be foolish; rather understand what the Lord's will is. And don't get drunk with wine; that is the way of excess and dissipation. Rather, be filled with the spirit! Speak to each other in psalms, hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody in your heart to the Lord, always giving thanks for everything to God the Father in the name of the Lord Jesus the Messiah.

For all the difficulties He encountered, Jesus was really a contented, joyful and happy person...and His people should be too. I'm not talking naivety or whistling past the graveyard. These are evil times we live in...we know that...but we have also seen the breathtaking view...the great love of God and outworking of that love in bringing salvation and victory over sin and death to the world...and it makes us want to celebrate it and it makes us want to sing about it...and it

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makes us want to tell others about what we have seen...Gospel...

Good News...Jesus is Savior and Lord!

The big picture and the bird's eye view remind us that every moment of a Christian's life springs from and has a share in what God is doing in the outworking of His good and kind intentions for His creation. We are the product of His mercy, love, and grace, and the light of the world. We have the power and the opportunity and the calling to do something about the darkness/wickedness all around by calmly and faithfully endeavoring to live the life God has enabled us to live.

I'll conclude with a story I heard from Bp. Morse which I think relates to St. Paul's admonition.

While in college, Bp. Morse was playing a game of touch football, and received a severe blow to the head when he was pushed into another player. He was knocked unconscious, and had to stay in the hospital for a month where he slept most of the time. When he was finally sent home, his head had still not cleared and his thoughts were a jumbled mess. His memory of who he was and how everything fit together was gone. Once home he spent his day on a bed in

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his mother's sewing room where she was working. He would ask her question after question, repetitively trying to make sense of everything, and she would patiently answer his questions, often the exact same ones, over and over...again and again...calmly and kindly assuring him of the certainty of what she was telling him, diligently keeping at her sewing tasks as she spoke to him. And then one day and after some time had gone by, it was as if a bell went off in his head (Bp. Morse said he actually heard a sound like a bell!). Everything made sense, everything was clear, he sat up from that bed and said to his mother, "I'm well now." He went back to college, got on with his life, and has always especially extolled the patience and calm of his dear mother for getting him through this ordeal.

Bp. Dan's story has become a little parable for me. His beloved mother's faithfulness, patience, quiet assurance and love...tending to her sewing and tending to her hurting son...became a picture for me of believers working out their own salvation in the midst of days colored with evil. Believers working out their own salvation while at the same time endeavoring to bring a calming, assuring, loving voice to

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their troubled, confused, and searching neighbors and acquaintances. .

There is something so attractive and appealing about Jesus. He is our default explanation for the faith, hope and love at work in our lives. There is such a clear sound of truth...a bell ringing truth about everything Jesus said and did, and our lives are now a part of that clear, steady sound and message to the world....each of us and all of us together working out our salvation while patiently answering the questions and dispelling the confusion plaguing those all around us until that bell goes off in their heads: "I'm well now...I understand...it's time to get up and be about the business of living my life as one of His."

"Wake up, you sleeper! Rise up from the dead! The Messiah will shine on you!" ...So don't be foolish; rather understand what the Lord's will is. And don't get drunk with wine; that is the way of excess and dissipation. Rather, be filled with the spirit! Speak to each other in psalms, hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody in your heart to the Lord, always giving thanks for everything to God the Father in the name of the Lord Jesus the Messiah.

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Help us Lord...help our churches...help our diocese today and
always. Amen.