

Trinity XX – 22 October 2023

“SEE then that ye walk circumspectly, not as fools, but as wise, redeeming the time, because the days are evil. Wherefore be ye not unwise, but understanding what the will of the Lord is.”

+In the Name of the Father and of the Son...

“Circumspectly” is a good word. Or at least, I like the way it sounds. I had to look it up before I wrote this sermon. It is one of those words, like many words, I suppose, where I think I had a pretty good idea of its usage, even how to use it in a sentence, but I could not give a definition of which I would be confident. “Wary and unwilling to take risks” the dictionary said. Oh, well that is me to a “t”, as far as unwilling to take risks. A friend of mine in college liked to say, not referring to me necessarily, “Silence is golden, unless it’s yellow.” There must be a fine line then between unwilling to take risks because one is circumspect, or because one is a coward.

With so many things in the Church, it seems to be a “both and” rather than a one or the other situation. In our Collect this morning, we prayed that God might keep us from all things that may hurt us.

That seems like a no-brainer: please help me not break my leg or get sick, right? Keep me safe from car accidents and burning buildings.

But what about the things that could be spiritually hurtful to us?

Those are the more dangerous. Or what about those things that are both, or at least connected? Think of what our Lord has said about it being better to go through life blind in one eye, or missing one hand, than to have both eyes or both hands and to burn in hell for all eternity. But just look at how busy Good Samaritan Hospital is on the average weekday compared to this Parish Church, and I can tell you what occupies the mind of the average Portlander!

But this still implies that we are not looking for what is harmful to us, whether physically or spiritually. Granted, it seems

counterintuitive to seek something physically harmful, but we all eat things for us that we know are not particularly healthy, for example. Just one more chocolate chip cookie never hurt anyone, right? But then there is the spiritual: unlike the chocolate chip cookie, we may not realize that something is not healthy for us spiritually until we are knee-deep into it. The Rector at the parish in Wisconsin where I was ordained a deacon and served during my senior year of seminary often said, “The devil takes something and makes it appear better than it really is.” This is especially true with those activities that are not always sinful. That is, they are not sinful in and of themselves, but can be depending on the context or the frequency. We all know that stealing is wrong. If I break into my neighbor’s garage in order to steal his new Bentley, I am going to be hard-pressed to spin that in my favor. But if I go back to my chocolate chip example, when does it rise to the level of a sin? Chances are we can all agree that one chocolate

chip cookie a month is perfectly acceptable. Likewise, we could agree that three bags of family-sized Chips Ahoy at lunch would likely rise to the level of gluttony. Now the hard part: where is the line between the two? Cookies may seem like a silly example, but it illustrates how the devil can take something relatively innocent and then push and push and push until it becomes something unhealthy for both body and soul.

In the Collect we go on to pray that we will “cheerfully accomplish” those things which God commands us to do, and presumably when we do not accomplish those things which He did not want us to do. Even if we are convinced that we are following the will of God, but we go about it with such a miserable attitude that everyone imagines we really are miserable, then we have removed the joy out of being a Christian. You may recall the Gospel read at Ash Wednesday where Christ says that when we fast, we should not

disfigure our faces so that others know how miserable we are while we fast. Drawing attention to ourselves by trying to make the point “I really do not want to be doing this but because God wants me to (and by extension, ‘Oh, aren’t I wonderful?’) and so I am going to do it, but I am going to make sure the whole world realizes how truly unhappy I am with the whole scenario.

The Epistle takes it a step farther by instructing us to discern what the will of the Lord is for us. That task is easier said than done, but we can be certain that it will not require us to sin. Scripture is quite clear that we are not to blame God and say that our choice to sin is somehow God’s fault because of how He made us. Sadly, for us Anglicans, according to St. Paul, wine is not going to provide us the answers we are looking for, but prayers and praise, singing specifically. Holiness and God’s will go hand in hand: we should not

strive to be holy, but we should strive to do God's will. If we do that, holiness will be a natural byproduct.

But we cannot permit ourselves to be so busy that we do not allow ourselves to hear God speaking to us. Our Gospel has the king prepare a banquet for his son's wedding, but those invited went about their busy lives and did not attend. Some even slew the messengers. They were fools, which St. Paul admonishes us not to be. They were not walking circumspectly, but threw caution to the wind, likely suffering from the "herd mentality". Maybe they just did not recognize it for what it was, as we sometimes fail to witness the will of God for our lives.

Of course, this is the eternal will of Our God, that we will join Him in the Heavenly Banquet on the other side. The Holy Communion which we shall receive in a few minutes is the tiniest sliver of a foretaste of that which is to come. We must be ready: the

Jews, symbolized by those initially invited to the banquet were not ready. Many on earth are not ready. But we can help point them to the God of Heaven and earth, and His banquet. I hear there might even be chocolate chip cookies served there.

+In the Name...