

How Do Wise Men Walk?
I Kings 3:3-14 (NRSV) and Ephesians 5:15-20 (RSV)
BAPC 15 August 2021

One year when this Epistle Reading came up in the lectionary cycle, I was working with about 70 Vacation Bible School children. And they were so **bright**, I figured I'd let them help me with my sermon. I read verse 15 to them: *Look carefully then how you walk – not as unwise me, but as wise.* And then I asked: *Tell me, folks – how do wise men walk?* And you **know** what **one** of them said? *Wise men don't walk. They ride camels!* Of course, they do.

Walking, you understand, is a **metaphor**... for the conduct of one's life. What Paul is saying is: *Look at how you are behaving, where you are heading in life and how you are getting there.* So, do any of you feel like taking Paul up on that... taking a look, engaging in a bit of self-examination? If so, I'll try and lend a hand by directing you to some of the advice Paul offers on the topic of how to walk wisely.

Given that this **is** – God knows – a **challenging** world... the **first** thing Paul urges is that we walk carefully... not casually, not mindlessly, but with care.

I used to enjoy watching the Hill Street Blues – a funny/serious police show. In each episode, the cops would gather in the precinct station at the beginning of their shift. They'd share news and requests, and get their assignments. Then the **chief** would dismiss them, sending them out to do their job, saying, *Be careful out there.* It's much the same message I hear from Lester Holt at the end of the evening news: *Take care of yourselves... and each other.*

There is good **reason** to be careful out there. It is, after all, an often dangerous world. Caution's called for... and it's prudent. But, it should be pointed out that when Paul was urging that we be careful, it's not only **caution** that he's counseling, but **caring**. *Live*, he pleads, *in light of Christ's coming. Live carefully... full of care for the world... full of concern... care like God's, who sent his Son to save us.* Like God, take care of the world. Don't leave it to its own devices, to die at its own hands. Care for it, and for yourselves and others as God's own children. That's the first way that wise persons live in this world... walk in the world: carefully.

A second way wise people live is **with understanding**. Wise people understand God's will. They recognize and remember what the Lord wants for the world and for them. I believe there's actually quite a lot of **mis**-understanding about this... even among Christ's people. According to some, the world and most of who and what is in it, is destined for the cosmic dustbin. God intends to destroy it. *So, save yourself*, they say... *and to hell with all the rest*.

Not so fast, old Paul proclaims. Rough... and tumbled... raw... and broken as the world is, God intends to redeem it. *The creation will be set free from its bondage*, Paul says. *And you* (that means us) – **you** will have a part to play in bringing this about.

If you and I understand that **redemption** is God's will for the world... then standing back... eyes averted from the injustices and wrongs around us... or, arms folded going, *tsk, tsk, tsk*... will **not** be how **we** live... how we walk in the world – not if we're Christ's disciples, anyway. We will engage others for good. We will RISC ourselves for justice. We will **care**. We **may** be effective, or we may not. But we **will** be engaged, trying to do what we can to bring God's grace to bear upon the people and institutions around us – our neighbors, our schools, governmental agencies, businesses and churches.

Then as wise people, a **third** thing we'll do is make the most of our time... of our opportunity, actually. Paul urges us, *Make the most of your time, because the days are evil*. Not in **spite** of the times being evil, but **because** they are.... bent, twisted, divided.

Because it is evil, this time needs every good thing we can put toward it... every bit of our energy, intelligence, imagination and love. Let's **see** what we can do... with **God** on our side! That is an approach to life that's positive... and very Christian. It is **not** polly-annish. It **recognizes** the muck and the mess we're often in. But it revels in the gracious rule of God, in God's will and ability to bring **good** things out of **anything**. Even the crucifixion!

In **this** manner, Christ's wise men and women approach the trials and challenges of life... if not with **eagerness**, then at **least** with confidence. (And sometimes also **with** eagerness to see what God will do!)

Now, perhaps the exact **opposite** of this approach is underscored in Paul's next bit of counsel: *Do not get drunk with wine*... (presumably we could add beer, spirits, coolers...) The **key** word is **drunk**. **Why** do people get drunk... why do they waste

away in Margaritaville? To **escape!** To escape something, maybe something inside themselves. *“The only time I’m feeling fine is when I’m in a bottle.”*

I admit, there have been times when I **have** turned **tail and run**, have tried to escape. But I **could** just as well have turned to God and said, *Lord, send me your Spirit today. It’s you who’ll see me through this.* And that’s what the wise person does – seeks not spirits to escape with, but The Spirit to fortify and help him or her face the challenge with faith and wisdom.

Paul **also** indicates how wise persons deal with **others** who are being challenged... with persons who are themselves engaged in the great and terrible adventures of human life: *Address one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs.*

Now frankly, for the longest time, I was puzzled by this advice. I couldn’t imagine going out with one of you for lunch and saying, *“You know, Amy: Halleluia!! I will give thanks to the Lord with my heart... in the company of the upright, in the great congregation! Great are the works of the Lord, Amy. Full of honor and majesty is God’s work, isn’t it? And, of course, God’s righteousness endures forever.”* It seemed a little farfetched to me. But then, maybe it isn’t. I mean... what I think Paul’s **getting** at... what he’s trying to get us **to do** for one another... is to share **encouragement**... our faith in God, our hope in God. Paul wants us to **remind** one another of the deep Source of our support.

Sometimes **we** can do that in words that are more naturally our own, like: *“You know what, Amy – this week, when I’ve been up against it, I’ve really sensed God as my close companion... right there and pulling for me. And I’ll bet God will be close to you as well this week, when you’re going through your surgery.”*

Or, we can use words that **others** have formed... like those ancient Biblical gems that still are so effective in comforting, inspiring or guiding folks. *“The peace of Christ be with you, friend.”*

Finally, today’s lesson lays **this** bit of counsel before us: *The wise person finds a way to thank God for everything, through Jesus Christ.* I suppose it’s easy enough to thank God when things are going well. It’s **less easy** to do it when things are challenging. And it’s downright **hard** to express gratitude when we don’t understand what’s going on and why it’s happening to us or to others for whom we care. But to express **thanks**, honestly, from the heart, is to express **confidence** in God, **trust** that God is Sovereign... that God is at work for good in all thing... that God **will redeem** the time... in God’s own time. Thank God for everything, Paul

urges us. That's good counsel... from someone who knew a thing or two... someone who knew Jesus Christ.

Well now, in a short while you will be walking out of here... getting **on** your camels... or **into** your Camrys, Cougars and Cadillacs... and heading off into the world. It is a beautiful, terrible, wonderful and dangerous world out there. It's also a world that God loves beyond all understanding. There are **lots** of ways you **could** conduct yourself out there, lots of ways in which you can walk. Though as God's children, with God's help, you will probably **want** to walk like wise men and women.

Beloved, go with God. Walk in faith. And Happy Trails to you!