

Thirteenth Sunday after Pentecost
Proper 15
Year B

Proverbs 9:1-6
Psalm 34:9-14
Ephesians 5:15-20
John 6:51-58

We have all seen the long lines that form outside some stores before they open on Black Friday - people hoping to get a great deal on some item. I have often wondered what bargain was worth missing a good night's sleep to stand, or sit, in line for hours before a store opened. Is it really worth it?

Time is important to us. We fret about wasting it, we try to utilize it to our advantage, and we constantly check our watches and clocks to see how much time we have. In our reading from Ephesians, we read that we are to "be careful in how we live, not as unwise people but as wise, making the most of the time." There is an urgency in this passage. Since these early days of the church, people have been looking for the return of the Lord. We have looked at the signs of the times - "the days are evil" - and we seek to know when the end time will be upon us.

Some seek solace in being active, others by self-medication. The writer cautions against this as it will deaden our senses to the moving of God's Spirit. We seek to do our best to prepare people around us by urging them to join us in church and in doing good deeds. We should gather together in worship, in seeking God. Corporate worship entails coming together in a single mindset to hear God's Word, to pray the prayers, and to sing. Modern psychology tells us that the neurons in our brains are changed through singing and we are opened through chants and spiritual songs to the moving of the Spirit. Looking at the incident recorded in Acts when Paul and Silas are in prison, we see them freed from their bonds while they were singing. Many times we are moved to unanticipated blessings through song - whether we are the singer or the hearer. Thus, corporate worship is central for our faith. As Desmond Tutu says, "I can only be I in relation to you." We need each other in life and in worship.

It is easy to read these verses and agree with what is there, until we come to the last verse of this passage. How can we "give thanks to God the Father at all times and for everything in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ"? As we look around us in the world today, or even in the days not so long ago, how can we thank God for everything? As we read earlier in the passage, "the days are evil." I think we can all agree on that. So, where does thanksgiving fit in? Perhaps we need to focus, not on the actions of people, but on the fact that this is the day God has made and we should rejoice in that. Do we ignore the pain and suffering that is all around us? No. But we can seek to find God in it. This is not a Pollyanna outlook, but a realization that all things do work together for the good of those who love the Lord, as Paul says elsewhere.

If we try to live into the wisdom of God, not focusing on the things of this world which is a waste of time, but seeking the movement of the Holy Spirit in the world around us, we might find ways to be thankful, even in hardship. What can we learn from this? Where might God be

leading us to help relieve some of the misery we see? What new direction can we take that will guide us?

Every day, God places new experiences before us, new challenges through the problems we see around us. How we react to these issues will say a lot about our commitment to work in God's plan, not our own. When we are doing God's will, we can give thanks for all things. It is not the consequences of man's actions for which we give thanks, but in the new direction God gives us to minister to those around us. It is a matter of changing our focus from all the negativity that is in the world to the possibilities that God is opening to those who believe. As we look to God for our salvation, we should also be looking to God for our mission. Time is short. Our worship is strengthening. Let us find new avenues to serve others and then we can give thanks always for the opportunities God has given us.