

You may remember the old advertising slogan for Reebok athletic shoes:
"Life is short, play hard."

That slogan is a variation of the classic Latin saying, "Carpe Diem," seize the day.

In the classic movie, *Dead Poet's Society*, the teacher played by Robin Williams not only encourages his students to seize the day, *Carpe Diem*. He also quotes the classic 17th Century poem:

"Gather ye rosebuds while ye may,
Old Time is still a-flying;
And this same flower that smiles today
To-morrow will be dying."¹

But perhaps my favorite expression of this theme comes from the classic rock song, "Time," by the British band, Pink Floyd:

"Ticking away the moments that make up a dull day
You fritter and waste the hours in an offhand way.
Kicking around on a piece of ground in your home town
Waiting for someone or something to show you the way.

"Tired of lying in the sunshine staying home to watch the rain.
You are young and life is long and there is time to kill today.
And then one day you find, ten years have got behind you.
No one told you when to run, you missed the starting gun.

"So you run and you run to catch up with the sun but it's sinking
Racing around to come up behind you again.
The sun is the same in a relative way but you're older,
Shorter of breath and one day closer to death."²

In other words, Pink Floyd is saying, "Life is short. Carpe Diem. Make the most of your time. Don't just let it slip away."

This is the 6th of 7 weeks of readings from the Epistle to the Ephesians. And in our section today from the 5th chapter, St. Paul certainly is telling us to seize the day, to make the best use of our time. Life is short, play hard. Or maybe life is short, pray hard.

Paul says to us,

"Be careful then how you live, not as unwise people but as wise, making the most of the time, because the days are evil. So do not be foolish, but understand what the will of the Lord is."³

¹ Robert Herrick, "To the Virgins, to Make Much of Time"

² from *The Dark Side of the Moon*, lyrics by Roger Waters

³ Eph 5:15-17

Be careful how you live. Be wise. Don't be foolish. Make the most of your time.

So what does Paul suggest? How should we make use of our time?

Well, first he advises against something that we can easily misunderstand. He says, "Do not get drunk with wine, for that is debauchery," or perhaps a better translation is "for that can lead to debauchery."

Now, this is not some tea-totaling message about abstaining from alcohol. It's not about being a party pooper or not enjoying parties. Heck, Jesus himself was a frequent guest at parties, and his first miracle was to provide enough wine to keep a party going. So Paul is not saying to avoid alcohol.

But this is a message about not abusing alcohol. We do know alcohol can be abused, and we do know that excessive substance abuse of various kinds can lower our inhibitions and get us in trouble in other ways. In fact, another possible translation of this verse could be, "Do not get drunk with wine in a self-destructive way." Don't destroy yourself with alcohol.

But there's another layer to what Paul is saying here. In his world, drunkenness and debauchery were characteristics of pagan worship. They were part of religious services. Drunken orgies were the way people worshipped in many if not most pagan temples in the Greco-Roman world.

So what Paul is saying is not primarily about substance abuse. It's about idolatry. That's why he follows his words about avoiding drunkenness and debauchery with words about worshipping God and giving thanks to God:

"Do not get drunk with wine, for that is debauchery; but be filled with the Spirit, as you sing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs among yourselves, singing and making melody to the Lord in your hearts, giving thanks to God the Father at all times and for everything in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ."⁴

There's something important here to unpack.

First of all Paul is saying something countercultural. He says to live wisely and make the most of your time. And then he suggests we spend our time doing something that not everyone would think is a good use of time. Prayer, worship, giving thanks to God.

Yes, we live busy lives. We work very hard in our culture.

And work is a very important part of our lives. In scripture God certainly calls us to work to support ourselves and our families by our labor. Our work is also a contribution we make to our larger community. So making the most of our time involves our labors in the world. And in 3 weeks, on Labor Day weekend, we'll have our annual celebration of our work in the world during our service here at St. Paul's.

⁴ Eph 5:18-20

Family obligations are also an important part of our lives. In scripture, God certainly calls us to love and support the members of our family: spouses, children, parents. So making the most of our time does mean spending quality time with our family members.

Yes, we also need down time, time to rest. Recreation after all is RE-creation, it involves being renewed. Finding Sabbath time is one of the 10 Commandments. Not 10 Suggestions. Commandments. God knows we need time to rest and recharge and renew. In our busy society, the lack of Sabbath time is one of the greatest challenges we face when it comes to our spiritual health.

But, when Paul speaks of making good use of our time he doesn't mention work, family, or rest as the greatest priority. Instead, Ephesians says to that the first priority for making good use of your time taking the time to spend with God. Be filled with his Spirit. Sing songs of praise. Offer thanks to God.

God is often an afterthought in our culture. But Paul is saying he needs to be a priority.

I hear all the time how people are busy, and I know it's true. But we make time for the things that are important to us. We find time to eat every day. We make time to brush our teeth and take showers.

Our relationship with God should be that important and that regular.

I know. I hear from folks that they don't have time to pray. And I know some folks have to work on Sundays. And I know it can be a struggle to get to church sometimes.

But I also know that some folks who can't find 10 minutes to pray can find 20 minutes to check their Facebook or 30 minutes to watch TV.

I know that some folks get nervous if church services last 70 minutes instead of 60 minutes. But then they're willing to spend 2 hours at a movie or a basketball game, or 4 hours playing golf or watching a football game.

Paul is encouraging us all to be wise in the use of our time. And worshipping and praising God need to be priorities in our lives.

Be careful how you live. Make the most of your time. Time, after all, is a gift from God.

Carpe diem. Seize the day.

Life IS short...
Work hard.
Play hard.
And pray hard.