

GRANT US WISDOM
Randall Tremba
August 16, 2015
20th Sunday in Ordinary Time
Shepherdstown Presbyterian Church

* * *

I Kings 2:10-12; 3:3-14

Give your servant therefore an understanding mind to govern your people, able to discern between good and evil; for who can govern this your great people?"

Ephesians 5:15-20

Be careful how you live, not as unwise people but as wise, making the most of the time, because the days are evil.

* * *

Are these evil days?

Parents think so.

Drugs and pornography are readily available everywhere. Or so it seems.

Every parent I know is worried.

And that's one reason I have invited parents of our youth to meet next Sunday afternoon. We will share our anxieties, our insights and our hopes. When my son was in a rough spot several years ago, this church family rallied to offer support, comfort and amazing grace.

We are all in this together.

No parent should think her child is immune. No parent should judge the parenting skills of others. Your turn will come.

No, we can't eliminate these dangers from society but we can educate ourselves about the consequences of choices. Still, the power of mind and the power of will are limited. So we must work to cultivate our children's innate wisdom and strength to help them make healthy and wholesome choices.

It takes a village.

It takes a church family.

Be careful then how you live, not as unwise people but as wise, making the most of the time, because the days are evil. Do not be foolish but understand the way of the Lord, which is to say, the way of life.

A parent once told me of her worries. She thought her child was doing drugs at a friend's house. We talked and prayed. A month or so later, after doing a little snooping the mother discovered that her child was not smoking pot as she feared. He was only drinking alcohol, she said with great relief.

Really? That's a relief?

Did she know that alcohol is far, far more destructive of health and society than pot is? Did she know that alcohol is far more dangerous and deadly and a far

more frequent gateway to other drugs? Of course neither drug should be used by minors. Ever! But still one drug is clearly and demonstrably far, far worse for persons and society than the other.

“Did you know that?” I asked.

Yes, she did. But still nonetheless she was relieved.

And that, as you might guess, is because one drug is illegal and the other isn't. It's true: one can send you to prison. But the other can send you to the morgue. When it comes to those two drugs, sadly enough, our society implicitly steers our youth toward the one that's far, far more dangerous.

God, have mercy.

And we've not even touched on heroin, prescription drugs or so called “bath salts.” What's a parent to do?

We will meet. We will talk. We will listen. We will pray. Knowledge is useful and necessary. But knowledge alone isn't sufficient. Wisdom and courage are required as well.

May God grant us wisdom for the facing of these days.

As dangerous as these drugs can be, they are not the only dangers to our youth and our society. There is another evil out and about that is destroying our nation. It's called fear mongering and it too is highly intoxicating, addictive, dangerous and destructive.

If you don't think these are evil times, you soon will if you watch a certain cable news outlet. For the past several years I have watched this news outlet religiously at 5:00 p.m. and boy, oh, boy, let me tell you, four of the five pundits on that show see evil everywhere. And from what I've heard, the prime time pundits are not much different. The world in their eyes is a very scary and evil place.

Apparently much of the nation shares their views. And that is scary. And that's why I watch and listen carefully.

For example, they see our President's deal with Iran as leading Jews to the oven doors. And if that ain't evil, what is?

They see a despicable criminal, a traitor to our nation about to become the Democrat Party's nominee. And if that ain't evil, what is?

They see “Black Lives Matter” as a ploy to stir up racial animosity in this country where racism hardly even exists anymore.

They see gay rights as infringing on religious freedoms.

They see Planned Parenthood auctioning off fetal parts for profit.

They see illegal immigrants hauling drugs and diseases into our country and raping our daughters.

And they see radical Islamic terrorist cells in nearly every American city about to attack a mall, a school or church near you and, to think, our President is too wimpy, too spineless and too un-American to name or confront this threat.

I should tell you that there are moments of civility, rationality, humanity and even some humor on that show. But then it's quickly back to doom and gloom, fear and more fear.

In case you hadn't heard, fearful people will turn on each other, surrender rights, and gleefully applaud the death of enemies. And if that ain't evil, what is?

If I didn't know better or didn't have other sources of information, I'd be perpetually terrified and angry. If I didn't know better, I'd want us to bomb Iran right now and possibly half of Syria and northern Iraq on the way over. And I'd not rule out nuclear weapons, if that's what it takes to destroy ISIS.

If I didn't know better, I'd get a gun and be ready to shoot any Muslim looking person.

If I didn't know better, I'd think white men were the real victims in our society.

Now you may see this differently, but what I see is this: a well-funded, concerted effort—from this source and others in this nation— to misrepresent reality in order to undermine the great American vision and experiment of unity with great diversity; to forsake the way of cooperation for the way of belligerence; to forsake the way of wisdom for the way of foolishness.

As we learned to say after the catastrophic invasion of Iraq in 2003: *so much intelligence; so little wisdom.*

Just because you're right; doesn't mean you're wise.

When I tell my friends I watch that particular news outlet they cringe because "friends don't let friends watch that network." But I do anyway because I want to be wise. To be wise is to be humble, to acknowledge our own flaws. To be wise is, in part, to listen to those with whom we disagree. And so I have, religiously for more than two years. And I've learned once again: we don't all see the world the same way.

These are troubling times—troubling times for our youth tempted by drugs and troubling times for our nation and the nations of the world who are tempted to buy the seductive drugs of fear and violence.

Remember this: we are a community of faith and hope. Let us not resign to fatalism or succumb to fear. May God grant us wisdom to understand the way of love and the courage to undertake it with all our hearts.

And, oh yes, one more thing. Where have you heard this before? *Be not afraid for I am with you.*

* * *

HYMN 307

"God of Grace and God of Glory"