

Redeem the time

A sermon preached by Revd Viv Bridges on Sunday 19 August at St Peter's for Trinity 12

Refs: *Proverbs 9.1-6 Ephesians 5.15-20, John 6.51-58*

Once again, we're in the season of a succession of Gospel readings based on Jesus as the true bread, his body and blood being the true food and drink. There's a limit to the number of sermons we can find about this, and we had a great sermon from Jo Coney about it last week, so I turned, as I do so often, to St Paul - from our Epistle - 'be careful how you live, not as unwise but as wise, "*making the most of time...*"

In the King James' version, the passage reads '*See then that ye walk circumspectly, not as fools, but as wise, redeeming the time, because the days are evil.*' I was reminded of the sundial on our tower - with that inscription 'REDEEM THE TIME'.

There seems to be a substantial difference between the two translations. 'REDEEM' and 'MAKE THE MOST OF' don't seem to be the same thing. REDEEM has a very deep, rather difficult, Biblical meaning so some commentators suggest that the newer versions of the Bible prefer to steer clear of it - using 'make the most of' instead.

I was fascinated, so looked up the Greek word Paul used. Strong's Dictionary suggests it had two uses. The first is 'to buy up for oneself, for one's use', 'by ransom to avert evil from oneself', 'to buy oneself off or deliver oneself'. Strong suggests that, in our verse from Ephesians, the meaning seems to be to 'make a wise and sacred use of every opportunity for doing good, so that zeal and well-doing are as it were the purchase-money by which we make the time our own.'

The other meaning is 'by payment of a price to recover from the power of another, to ransom, buy off'. So the 'BUYING BACK' of something that has been sold or given to someone else, redeeming an object that has been pawned, for example, or in times gone by, 'buying back' someone who has been sold or stolen into slavery. At Candlemas we celebrate 'the Presentation' of Christ in the temple'. Mary and Joseph brought the baby Jesus to 'present' him to the Temple, because all first-born male animals, including sons, had been committed to God, because God had saved the first-born Israelites from the plague that killed all the Egyptians. Sons were 'BOUGHT BACK', REDEEMED, with an appropriate offering.

So, both senses of 'Redeem' seem to involve payment of some sort - either to pay back and recover something that has been lost, or up-front to assure our future. The NRSV version vaguely reflects this - 'making the most' of the time suggests we can save up brownie points, as if we can buy or insure our way to eternal life. But it avoids that rather difficult sense of having to make up for the things we might have already done wrong - that enslave us now in some way.

How *can* we redeem those times that we feel we wasted, or that we feel were spent doing harm to others, or to ourselves? What can we do about those times that we feel guilty or ashamed about? I wonder how many times we've said to ourselves or to others '*If only I'd done this, or that If only I could go back and do it again...*'. Well, one thing is certain - we can't ! We can't go back and change the facts. But there might be things we can do to change the effects that those times are having today.

It might be that we have never really faced up to the things we have done, and so this would be a good place to start. If we have done things that hurt others, it might be that we can contact those people, say sorry, do something to make amends for what we have done. This is often not possible, so then all we can do is to hand the situation over to God, asking for forgiveness. God promises to forgive us the things we regret if we are truly sorry about them. And then we have to let things go and move on. *Not* to do so is a lack of faith and trust in God's promises. This might be very hard, but something to work at, not forgetting what we've done, but not letting it impinge on our lives, not letting it diminish or reduce the wholeness of our life now. Our

collect and post-communion prayer pick out this aspect of 'redeeming the time', the healing effects of forgiveness.

The other important thing to do is, whatever has gone before, to live now in a way that is wise, that is Christ-like, that brings wholeness of life. And here, of course, St Paul gives us much extremely good advice. Throughout his Epistles he reminds us how to live Godly lives. And today, "*Wherefore be ye not unwise, but understanding what the will of the Lord is. And be not drunk with wine, wherein is excess; but be filled with the Spirit; Speaking to yourselves in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody in your heart to the Lord; Giving thanks always for all things unto God and the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ*"

Paul urges us to seek out and follow Christ's will, and live according to the Holy Spirit. It's not that he rejects 'the flesh' - he doesn't see worldly things as evil in themselves. It's how we use them that makes the difference. I suspect that telling those early Christians not to drink wine would have caused a great problem - water was not plentiful, and was probably pretty grim! But drinking too much wine was debauchery. *Giving in* to the desires of the body can lead to being enslaved by them but *taking care of the body's needs* is vital to our being able to use them as the Temple of the Holy Spirit. So one way we might UNDO, REDEEM, HEAL some of the harmful things we've used our time for might be to take more care of the body - exercise, rest, good diet.

Above all, Paul urges us, as we try to 'make the most' of the time we have left to us, to focus on GOD himself, to pray, to praise, to give thanks. In this way we become open to the gift of the Holy Spirit, and it is the Spirit that guides us to make the best use of our time.

Of course, Jesus Christ offers the way to cover all these aspects of redemption. He is our 'Redeemer' - for our past, for today, and for the days left to us. He 'BOUGHT' us out of the slavery that sin binds us in to by paying the ultimate ransom - his own death. And this is a ONCE-FOR-ALL REDEMPTION. It doesn't just cover the things we've done wrong, it covers the things we *shall* do wrong - he always offers us forgiveness when we are sorry for those things. And he teaches us how to use our time to bring us fullness of life, real life. Jesus told us to 'rest in him', to take up *his* burden, *his* yoke, to live *in him*. He offers us the true nourishment we need for making the most of our days, he offers us his body and his blood, the true food, the true drink.

Making the most of, redeeming, the time has two aspects:

looking back to try to *undo* the negative effects of things we regret in the past, *healing* any damage done by them; and

looking forward to make sure what we do now is wise, not foolish.

Both these things take insight, courage and strength, but are possible through Jesus Christ, our Redeemer. He teaches us wisdom and promises us courage and strength through his presence with us constantly, through the Holy Spirit that he pours out in abundance on us all.

And he does this because he loves us, each one of us, deeply and unconditionally.

Amen.