

Emmanuel Ev. Lutheran Church—Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod

Pentecost 13

August 22, 2021

Sermon by Pastor Jon D. Buchholz

Stay sharp!

—Ephesians 5:15-20

Do you ever find yourself taking things for granted? Not just taking anything for granted but taking for granted things that are remarkable and amazing?

You know that I travel a fair amount for my district work. That means that I often fly to different places. The routine is consistent: Check in, go to the airport, go through security, board the plane, fly to my destination, finish my business and fly back. It becomes routine. But then one day, 45 minutes before we're scheduled to land, it hits me: We are flying. We are *flying!* We're screaming through the air in a pressurized aluminum tube at 500 mph. The outside temperature is -50°, and there is nothing but six miles of thin air between me and the ground. Human beings have wanted to fly, to soar through the air for thousands of years, and we get to do it for the price of a plane ticket! Is this not the most remarkable and amazing thing? Yet for us today it's commonplace. Would you like anything else before we land?

Or here's another one that's easy to take for granted: air conditioning. Can you imagine life in the Valley without it? Yet for thousands of years human beings lived without it; it didn't exist until recently. (Someone recently asked me if I remember the days when the church was cooled with swamp coolers. Yes, I do! They don't work very well this time of year when the humidity rises.) But you have AC. You have it in your car, in your home, in your office. We scarcely think about it in church unless one of our units isn't working and it gets too warm, or someone gets overzealous with the thermostats and it gets too cool. Do you realize that even today the vast majority of the world does not have air conditioning—even in places that are a lot more beastly hot and humid than here in Phoenix. The comfort we enjoy is remarkable and amazing, yet we often take it for granted.

It's easy to take things for granted, even things that should astound and amaze us. Our Scripture today reminds us that there are some things that we cannot take for granted—that we *dare not* take for granted. Stay awake! Stay vigilant! Stay sharp!

It's easy to take time for granted. Our translation of the Bible says, "Be very careful how you live—not as unwise but as wise, making the most of every opportunity." In Greek it says simply, "Making the most of time." Time is short. We only have a short time on this earth. Don't waste your time. There is nothing wrong with time for recreation, but spending copious amounts of time watching television, playing video games or surfing the Internet for hours on end is very simply wasting your life. Those pastimes are not wrong, but keep them under control because if you don't the day will come when you look back on all the wasted time and wonder where your life has gone. There are better ways to use your time, better ways to make the most of every opportunity. Scripture isn't talking about making the most of every opportunity to earn more money or every opportunity to gain personal advancement. It's talking about using your time in ways that are useful, productive, helpful to others, in ways that edify and serve other people. Spend time with your children, modeling Christian parenting. Spend time with people you love, encouraging and helping. Spend time helping your neighbor, serving in your community. You are a Christian and a citizen, with an important role to carry out as the salt of the earth and the light of the world, a beacon for Jesus. Use your time—every second!—to honor God.

It's easy to take our culture for granted. Ephesians says we are to make the most of every opportunity "because the days are evil." Nothing has changed since this was written. We are living in evil times. Our culture is evil. We are surrounded by people who sometimes look very nice on the outside but whose hearts are evil. And sometimes that evil around us is obvious and in our face. It's easy to take the world around us for granted and forget that the world is an enemy of God. As the Apostle James says, "Friendship with the world (that is with our culture) is hatred against God." Our culture has determined to destroy God's gift of marriage. The law of our land allows the destruction of marriage and family. Our culture promotes immorality, indecency, wickedness, perversion. We say, "Well, of course, I can see that," but like a frog in boiling water we become accustomed to it, and we become comfortable and tolerant of behavior that is a wicked abomination in the eyes of God. We send our kids off to secular college to sit at the feet of secular humanities professors whose stated goal is to destroy the Christian faith of the students in their class. They tell their students to think for themselves—not like their parents or their pastors taught them to think, and certainly not like Jesus tells us to think. And that's what the students do—they think for themselves, and they no longer have the mind of Christ, and they reject the Christian

faith in which they were raised. The days are evil. Satan is active. And Christian souls who forget that the days are evil become easy prey for the Evil One. Don't take culture for granted. It's evil! Stay sharp!

It's easy to take self-control for granted. The Apostle Paul says, "Do not be foolish, but understand what the Lord's will is. Do not get drunk on wine, which leads to debauchery. Instead be filled with the Spirit." Everyone knows what happens when we consume wine or beer or hard liquor: it degrades our ability to stay sharp. The Bible doesn't condemn legal drinking in moderation; you want to have an adult beverage you're free to do so (if you're an adult). But don't get drunk, which leads to additional sinful behavior. Even our culture—that's so wicked in many areas—knows that you shouldn't drink and drive. How many lives have been tragically lost because someone thought they were in control when they never should have gotten behind the wheel? How many people have plunged into immoral behavior under the influence of alcohol? Scripture says, "Don't do it!" "Do not get drunk on wine, which leads to debauchery. Instead, be filled with the Spirit." Find your comfort, your peace your joy, your exuberance not in alcohol but in the Holy Spirit, in a life of temperance and obedience that honors God.

It's easy to take our church for granted. Do you realize that in today's world, many people view church membership kind of like they view membership at Costco? Maybe you pay your dues and extend your membership, or maybe you let it lapse. Maybe you quit shopping at Costco and shop somewhere else instead. What's the big deal? We can come and go as we please. That may be fine for your connection to Costco, but that is a very wrong way to view our connection to Christ's church! First, outside of Jesus' church, his body, there is only death and damnation. We stay connected to Jesus, or we die eternally. It's that simple, and it's that serious. Second, our connection to Jesus doesn't happen in a vacuum, and it certainly doesn't happen when we pay some dues; it happens when we are connected to Jesus through his Word and through his Sacraments. "Faith comes from hearing the message, and the message is heard through the word of Christ" (Romans 10:17). Without the Word and without the Sacrament faith atrophies and dies. Period.

Instead of taking church for granted, reflect on what an astounding and amazing thing it is to be surrounded by a group of sincere, devout human beings—Christians!—in which the Spirit of God lives. Scripture says, "Speak to one another with psalms, hymns and spiritual songs. Sing and make music in your heart to the Lord, always giving thanks to God the Father for everything, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ. Today you are here in God's house with people who are like-minded, wrestling with the same struggles we are in the world, who are willing to take a stand in the world for what is right, contending for the same truth. These people around you are people who will pray for you, encourage you, who will love you, forgive you when you sin, and support you through the difficulties you are facing. Don't take church for granted! Step back and consider what an amazing, remarkable thing it is that you are in the house of God together with the people of God! Today you will eat and drink the body and blood of Jesus under the bread and the wine. Your soul will be fed. Your spirit will be strengthened. Your sins are forgiven. This is an amazing and astounding thing that we share!

It's easy to take all these things for granted because it's easy to take Jesus for granted. It's easy to take for granted what we have through Jesus our Savior. Jesus is not an abstract concept. Jesus is not a system of doctrines or a philosophy. Jesus is not just the founder of a great religion called Christianity. No, Jesus is the Son of God in the flesh. He is your brother, he is your Savior, and he is your friend. He loves you and laid down his life for you, so that you could possess the most astounding, amazing thing that any human being could ever possess: The forgiveness of your sins, a right relationship with God that lasts forever, the gift of immortality. Just stop and reflect on what you have in Jesus. You're going to live with him forever. No matter how sick you are, no matter how much you're suffering, we get a brand-new body in the resurrection. No matter how much this perverse world and culture is causing you sadness and suffering, it's just temporary, and soon you get to be in heaven. As we sang in one of our hymns last week, "Earth has no sorrow that heav'n cannot cure."

Don't take Jesus for granted. Don't take his Holy Spirit who lives in you for granted. Be very careful how you live, not as unwise but as wise, making the most of every opportunity. Stay alert! Stay astounded and amazed! Stay sharp with a razor-sharp focus on Jesus. Amen.