

Overflow

Part 6 of Sermon Series: *No Longer Strangers*

a sermon based on

Ephesians 5:15-20

(with reference to John 6:51-58)

and delivered on

August 26, 2018

14th Sunday after Pentecost (Year B)

at

Cherry Valley United Methodist Church

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NOTE: The texts follow the lectionary for the previous week.

“You'd think that people would have had enough of silly love songs
I look around me and I see it isn't so
Some people want to fill the world with silly love songs
♪♪ And what's wrong with that
I'd like to know
'Cause here I go again
I love you, I love you
I love you, I love you”¹

I don't think that one is in the hymnal. But it does cause one to wonder. Doesn't it? All the news says that people have said enough with silly religion.. But I look around me and I see ... Well, maybe it is so. People have had enough of “silly” religion. People have had enough of the “foolish” religious folk who make a point of their righteous demands for society – and then live lives of what Saint Paul just called debauchery in the passage we heard a moment ago

So, what's wrong with that? I'm going to let you know. It's foolishness. How can we share that good news of fulfillment in life through our relationship with Jesus Christ when – too often – we turn to the same evil activities as the world to find exhilaration? We say we love the Lord; and then we have an affair that not only leaves us broken, but keeps others from Jesus.

Let me be clear. Paul says, “Do not get drunk”. He doesn't say, “Don't drink wine at all.” He even recommends a little wine to Timothy in his first letter to him when he writes in chapter 5 verse 23, “No longer drink only water, but take a little wine for the sake of your stomach and your frequent ailments.”² Again, this was after warning deacons and elders to avoid drunkenness and greed and other sorts of mischief. Paul knew that the church needed wine for Holy Communion so that we might eat the flesh and drink the blood of Jesus and live forever. Wine can be used for holy purposes.

Too much – and in a different purpose – opens one up to all sorts of evil. The great irony is that the momentary pleasure – the momentary exhilaration – leads to some miserable consequences. Not only the stupid and hurtful things we might say or do, but the hangover.

I was a bit of a party animal in college. I admit it. Even after college I was known to tie one on after work on Friday night. And then it dawned on me, even if I didn't do something that I regretted because of it, my Saturday (my day off) was ruined by a hangover.

It's not just alcohol or drugs that present a danger. Drugs can be useful, that's why physician's prescribe them. But... Biologically, the danger for so many of these destructive activities comes from how they excite dopamine production in the brain. Amphetamines and cocaine can prompt more than ten times the normal dopamine production as an everyday pleasurable experience. Other activities can have a similar effect whether it be the high of a big win at the roulette table, or the thrill of bonking ten pigs at once with an angry bird, or the accumulation of “likes” on Facebook.

But eventually in each case they make it harder and harder to experience pleasure – to experience joy. Not only in the activity (which then urges us to try harder), but in every other experience of life. That is just foolish.

The Christians in Ephesus were used to the pagan festivals and the incumbent overindulgence and debauchery accompanied their celebrations of pagan gods and heroes. Why not “enjoy” the same pleasures when the God revealed to us in Jesus Christ is real and so much better?

Because it's not holy. But also because that pleasure is fleeting. A bottle of beer each day probably won't kill you, but a six-pack will probably give you cirrhosis. And that will kill you.

¹ Paul McCartney, *Silly Love Songs* (Hollywood: Capitol Records, 1976)

² 1 Timothy 5:23 (NRSV)

Buy your wife or husband or kids or your friends a nice gift, and it will bring them joy. Try to buy their love with more and more, it becomes expected and under valued and puts you miserably in debt. Make lots of “likeable” posts on Facebook and share everything you find so that you can be connected, and you might start to find yourself (if not unfriended) then having your posts blocked.

All of these things come from that same spiritual quest for happiness – for fulfillment. Paul tells us the answer, he says, “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 the Lord Jesus Christ.”³

He’s telling them, “This is the good news. The Holy Spirit is offering you more exhilaration – more fulfillment – more hope than anything else in the world –AND all of this without a hangover. Well sort of. The hangover the Spirit offers is this – that when you gather together (Notice that the passage doesn’t just say when you sing psalms and hymns – but when you do so **among** yourselves.) to sing your praises and offer your prayers – not necessarily on key – but with a melody in your heart (Which St. John Chrysostom tells us meaning to claim the words) when you sing like that – when you offer your praise you avail yourselves – you make yourselves receptive to the blessings that the Holy Spirit already has in store for you, so that you might not only find joy in the moment – but energy and hope to carry on tomorrow when all hell is breaking out around you. Rather than every day blessings and pleasures losing their ability to bring joy – those joys become amplified. Rather than being incapacitated – you have hope.

This is how it happens – when you let your love show. It’s like that in all our relationships. Credit card companies prey on college students. Parents – students – you need to hear this. Credit card companies prey on college students. My freshman year of college – the first semester – I had no job. But I got a credit card. I racked it up a couple of months later. Do you know how? I bought Christmas gifts for my mom and dad and brother and sister and my girlfriend that I really couldn’t afford. I broke up with the girlfriend a couple of weeks later. I’m pretty sure that both my mom and dad would have rather had me call to talk or go home for visits a little more frequently than getting those gifts. Especially if they would have known about the stress that that Christmas credit card bill was causing.

I hope I’m not being egocentric, but I think all of us would rather get a phone call or a visit from someone we love out of the blue rather than an automated “happy birthday” post to our Facebook page.

You know, I don’t think I’ve ever given Susan flowers for Valentine’s Day. Certainly not roses. Partly because they cost two to three times as much on February 14 as they do the week before or after, but also because I know that her favorite flower is irises. Flowers on Valentine’s Day is expected. I buy her flowers when the whim hits, just because.

When we extend ourselves to one another “just because” it becomes so much more powerful than any trinket or perfunctory acknowledgement. When we look for excuses to praise someone in our circle of friends or within this congregation as the family of God we not only uplift their spirits but ours are strengthened to receive blessing. The more we do it – the more hope we extend.

Let us be filled with the Holy Spirit by coming together and letting it out – letting it overflow – with such gusto that a melody to the Lord springs out from our heart. God didn’t hold back. Jesus didn’t hold back – he didn’t just die on the cross – but he offers us his flesh and blood to sustain us. We don’t have to do anything for the offer. But to receive – to claim those promises – we do need to prepare ourselves. What we receive lasts not just for the moment but leads to eternal life.

You’d think that God would have had enough of silly love psalms,
I look around and know it isn’t so.
God is pleased with the melody of off-key love psalms.

³ Ephesians 5:18b-20

'Cause it lets him say to you, again.

I love you. I love you. I love you. I love you.

And that love overflows. Even this much {extend arms as Jesus' were on the cross} AMEN.