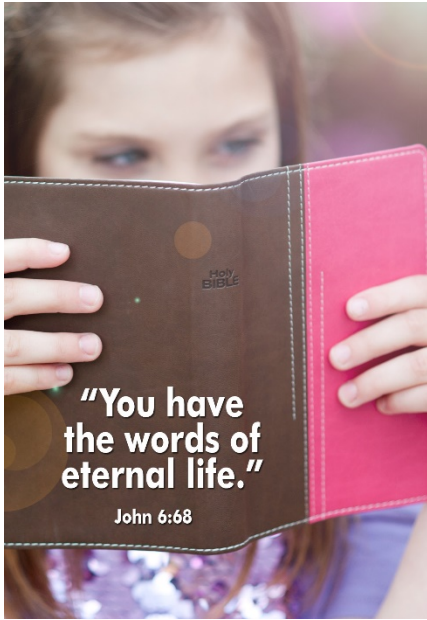


SEMPER PARATUS



"I have plenty of time. I'll do this or that later!!" Libraries are filled with self-help books on time management and battling procrastination. The Apostle Paul puts it this way: *"Look carefully then how you walk, not as unwise but as wise, making the best use of the time, because the days are evil"* (Ephesians 5:15-16). A great way to "redeem" your time or make the "best use of every moment" is to **always be ready** as we have opportunity (Galatians 6:10). Why? Quite simply, none of us have that much time. On the average, according to the American Time Use Survey, each work day you'll spend 7.6 hours sleeping, 8.8 hours working, 1.1 hours eating, and 1.1 hours doing chores around the house, leaving you with about five and half hours left over for doing what you want to do. And these figures don't include investing time into your relationships, caring for others, or any

other commitments and responsibilities you have already. If you have children or grandchildren nearby, you know how fast any free time goes. We all start each day with the same 24 hours, but when you subtract all your commitments from that, you really don't have much time left.

This past Sunday the annual Coast Guard Festival in Michigan came to a close after ten days of celebrating the work of all those serving in our nation's Coast Guard. The Coast Guard's motto is: **Semper Paratus - Always Ready**. The main focus of the Coast Guard is search and rescue. Their primary purpose is to save lives. No matter how horrible the storm, no matter how high the waves, the Coast Guard was called to go out. As a matter of fact, the saying was, "You have to go out, but you don't have to come back." That's how dedicated the crews are. When you think about it, isn't this our motto as eternal disciples of Jesus? Always ready! Always prepared!! As we have opportunity ("As we are going" - the Great Commission), share the Good News. Read more about what God's Word this week has to say to encourage and equip us in mission and ministry.

Always Ready...Always Prepared

The Apostle Peter encourages us, *"But in your hearts honor Christ the Lord as holy, always being prepared to make a defense to anyone who asks you for a reason for the hope that is in you; yet do it with gentleness and respect,..."* (1 Peter 3:15). Peter may have given the best reason of all as Jesus asked the twelve, *"Do you want to go away as well?"* (John 6:67) Simon Peter answered Him, *"Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life, and we have believed, and have come to know, that You are the Holy One of God"* (John 6:68-69). In other words, Peter was saying, "We are your disciples, no matter what." But we know Judas betrayed and Peter denied Jesus. And like those first disciples, we run into roadblocks to following Jesus when our world's culture and the words of Jesus collide.

It was amazing to tour the ships and watch the Coast Guard as they drilled for any and every possible scenario. They train and are equipped so that they can live up to their motto of "Always Ready." As children of the Light, followers of Christ, we're called to be just as ready, just as prepared. Why? Because we never know when our faith will be tested or when we'll have the opportunity to share the Good News with others, which, as the Apostle Paul says, is "making the most of the time." How do we make sure we are always ready, always prepared? The answer to the eternal hope that you have is Jesus, only Jesus!

Please notice in this week's Gospel (John 6:51-69), the large group of people that John had previously described as the "crowds," he now describes as "disciples." The crowds had finally found what they were looking for - a miracle worker, a bread king, their "meal" ticket. No need to look any further, right?! That was true right up until Jesus said that HE, in the flesh, is the Bread of Life and those who eat of His flesh and drink of His blood will have eternal life. Those were hard words, difficult to understand words - and words that led them to say, "We need to look elsewhere." Maybe you know of someone or maybe you've experienced it yourself when it comes to the Bible - you're in full agreement with everything in God's Word but then you run up against the power of the cross, the authority of all of Scripture, infant Baptism, closed communion - not to mention - the role of women in the church, marriage, a hateful thought or word as murder, lust in your heart as adultery - and then there's same sex marriage, homosexuality, and gender identity. Well, those are hard teachings. Who can listen to it? And people don't. They disagree. They can walk away and find a home somewhere else.

Have you ever wondered about the difference between the disciples who left Jesus that day and those who stayed? Now in asking this question we must be careful. For as easy as it is to write off those other disciples as blind unbelievers, it's even easier to imagine Peter and the rest as flawless, faith superheroes. And this, as each of the four evangelists points out, was simply not the case, for these disciples were also plagued by sin, doubt and fear. They suffered at times from an overabundance of pride or a lack of courage, and they, too, eventually deserted Jesus. So if they aren't smarter or more faithful or more courageous or, in short, any better than the rest of Jesus' disciples - then or now - **then what is it that sets them apart?** *"Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life."* Peter knew that everything he needed now and for eternity was in Christ alone. That's it! That's what makes him and the other eleven different! It's not their brains or their ability or their status or even their faith. They simply refuse to look elsewhere when they have Jesus. They will not go away! They refuse to let anything else matter.

Are you a beaver or an otter?

A little book titled, *"Daily Grace,"* contrasts two similar looking animals that reside often side-by-side in the streams and ponds of North America. One animal, the beaver, works throughout the day toppling trees to create large river dams. The other animal, the river otter, delights in

making a game of everything. Otters catch what they need to survive, but also make time to chase after pebbles, slide down slopes, and tweak the tails of their more industrious neighbors. “Both animals live about the same length of time, but you have to believe that otters enjoy life just a bit more. Otters seem perfectly content if they have enough food and are happy to live in little mud holes along the river. Even in old age **they never miss the opportunity** to toss a stone in the water and catch it before it hits bottom.”

So which one are you? A beaver or an otter? Both animals have their place in creation, but I wonder how many people miss all kinds of opportunities in life because they are so narrowly focused on the serious business of making a living that they never get around to making a life. The Great Commission reminds us that being always ready and always prepared for sharing the saving Good News of Jesus Christ is found in the course of our daily living (As you are going...) not with having a single focus of witnessing alone.

When we hear Scripture tell us that we need to make the best use of our time because the days are evil, immediately our minds imagine a singular focus. With as little time as we actually have, can I really carve out any time for sharing the Good News? The beaver and the otter are both accomplishing similar goals. But the beavers miss opportunities that appear right before them. Whereas the otter, as they are going about their daily tasks, make the best use of every opportunity that presents itself. Let me suggest this: **The best use of our time is to abide with Jesus 24/7** knowing that He faithfully abides with us no matter what, and He alone equips us to always be ready and prepares us for the opportunities that He Himself will give.

Two different kinds of people: believers (alive) and unbelievers (dead).

When it comes to eternity, there are only two kinds of people: believers (disciples of Jesus) and unbelievers. Believers (disciples, children of the Light) simply refuse to look elsewhere when they have Jesus. Even though we realize there are all kinds of people and different strokes for different folks, according to God’s Word and in God’s own reckoning, there are only two kinds of people: believers who are alive now and for eternity and unbelievers who are dead now and for eternity. This is a hard teaching, even for us, because we live among a variety of faiths and beliefs, shades and variations, and who are we to classify them as either dead or alive?

But Jesus Himself makes the distinction - and for good reason. Until we accept the truth that only those who believe in Jesus as the One Way, the One Truth and the One Life are righteous, have life, receive the forgiveness of sin, and are invited to partake of Christ Himself - we are **not** thinking eternally; we are not thinking Spirit and life; instead we are thinking world and flesh. According to the world and our sinful flesh, everyone is entitled to their own beliefs and faith; it’s their own personal, private matter. But to the Spirit of God, He desires everyone to be saved and there is only one way - through Christ!

Should that change how you view other people? You bet! Not to judge others but share with conviction, with urgency, with passion this saving truth. If you knew a cancer patient and you could connect them with the one cure, would you even hesitate to share this truth with them? Certainly not! God's Word this Pentecost season continues to drive home the point: **Apart from Christ the Vine, you can do nothing**. Jesus made it clear - whoever eats His flesh and drinks His blood, that is, whoever embraces Him in true, saving faith, which is God's gift, will live forever. Conversely, who does not, has no life in them. Jesus stands alone as the Source of eternal life.

The whole purpose of Christ coming down from heaven to be in the flesh for us in His incarnation is for the eternal benefit of our souls - that by grace through faith in Christ Jesus, we are justified, declared righteous before God and seen as holy and blameless in His sight. By His work alone we are eternal disciples! That's indeed worthy of a celebration. But along with Jesus, we mourn another truth. Not everyone who hears the Word will believe. The other kind of people, unbelievers, can never make themselves believers. No believer - or missionary - or evangelist - or pastor - is called to convert an unbeliever. The Church's mandate is to proclaim the Good News about Jesus and invite people to repent of their sin and to believe that Jesus Christ is the one and only Savior from sin, death, the world and flesh. Jesus' words of Spirit and life have made us eternal disciples.

The answer for the hope that you have: Abide in Jesus!

These days are evil - will you go away, too? Our answer in faith is NO! Jesus alone has the words of eternal life. These words change how we view ourselves and the people around us. We are called to make the most of every opportunity because it's a matter of life and death. It's a hard saying for some who want life to be full of variety and options. But for the believer - it is a matter of comfort and assurance to know that in Jesus we have everything - now and for eternity. Both in times of joy and in sorrow, in sickness and in health, in season and out of season, we are blessed to look to Christ Jesus and Him alone, asking with Peter, "*Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life.*" Thanks be to God, as believers, we are disciples of a Lord who always abides with us as our Immanuel. As Jesus abides with us and we with Him, we participate in His mission - "*For the Son of Man came to seek and to save the lost*" (Luke 19:10). SEMPER PARATUS - We are always ready to make the best use of the opportunities God gives to us as His disciples.

Since we are still living in the afterglow of the Tokyo Olympics, I share this story: At the Olympic games in Paris in 1924 (the site of the 2024 Olympics), the sport of canoe racing was added to the list of international competitions. The favorite team in the four-man canoe race was the United States team. One member of that team was a young man by the name of Bill Havens. As the time for the Olympics neared, it became clear that Bill's wife would give birth to her first child about the time that Bill would be competing in the Paris Games. In 1924 there were no jet airliners from Paris to the United States, only slow-moving ocean-going ships. And so Bill found

himself in a dilemma. Should he go to Paris and risk not being at his wife's side when their first child was born? Or should he withdraw from the team and remain behind. Bill's wife insisted that he go to Paris. After all, he had been working towards this for all these years. It was the culmination of a life-long dream. Clearly the decision was not easy for Bill to make. Finally, after much soul searching, Bill decided to withdraw from the competition and remain behind with his wife so that he could be with her when their first child arrived. Bill considered being at her side a higher priority than going to Paris to fulfill a life-long dream.

To make a long story short, the United States four-man canoe team won the gold medal at the Paris Olympics - with Bill's replacement. But get this: Bill's wife was late in giving birth to her first child. So late in fact, that Bill could have competed in the event and returned home in time for the birth. People lamented, "What a shame." But Bill said he had absolutely no regrets. After all, his commitment to abide with his wife was more important. A high price, yes, but not too high a price for someone he loved and a newborn son he adored.

Semper Paratus!

Have you ever wondered what happened to the large crowd that walked away from Jesus in John, chapter 6? We're not told in Scripture. But if your heart is tugged by this tragedy, you have a heart for the lost. We live in a world that is evil. But more tragically, we live in a world where increasingly people are not only walking away from Jesus but want nothing to do with God period (the nones). As a believer, our hearts are broken. Only in Christ are we taken from being dead in sin to alive for eternity, from broken to made whole, from hurt to healed. Christ abides with us to equip, enable and empower us to live as children of the Light. We know that from that day when many disciples went away, Jesus went to the cross and died for them, for you and for the world in need of Him. And what about those who walk away today? Well, don't give up on them either. Pray for them. Share with them the words of eternal life you know found only in Christ. Because we have a Savior who abides with us, we have the gift of eternity. We are always ready, always prepared. Semper Paratus!!

That reminds me. There is a sequel to the story of Bill Havens. The child eventually born to Bill and his wife was a boy, whom they named Frank. Twenty-eight years later, in 1952, Bill received a cablegram from his son. It was sent from Helsinki, Finland, where the 1952 Olympics were being held. The cablegram read, and I quote it exactly: "Dad, I won. I'm bringing home the gold medal you lost while waiting for me to be born." Frank Havens won that gold medal for the United States in the canoe-racing event, a medal his father had dreamed of winning but never did. Where did this boy learn such love and faithfulness to family? He learned it from his father who gave up his chance at Olympic gold for a woman he loved and a boy soon to be born that he adored.

We have learned from our Heavenly Father and His Son the blessing of abiding grace to make us eternal disciples. Two of my favorite hymns in LSB are "Abide With Me, #878" and "Abide,

O Dearest Jesus, #919". *"Hold Thou Thy cross before my closing eyes; Shine through the gloom and point me to the skies. Heav'n's morning breaks, and earth's vain shadows flee; In life, in death, O Lord, abide with me"* (#878, vs. 8). *"Abide, O faithful Savior, Among us with Your love; Grant steadfastness and help us To reach our home above"* (#919, vs. 6).

Jesus did not convert everyone He preached and ministered to. Disciples fell away on His watch. But Jesus was faithful to His Word and promises. We are called to be faithful to His mission and ministry - to seek and to save the lost. Therefore, with the presence of our abiding Savior, we are always ready and always prepared for the opportunities to share the answer for the hope that we have. Jesus alone gives the gift of eternal life. In Him, a person is made alive - now and forever. Therefore, we can say along with the Coast Guard motto: Semper Paratus!

As believers, we must go out - because our Lord, who abides with us, is always seeking to save the lost. He loves the entire world - including those who have fallen away and those who want nothing to do with Him. He lived, died and rose for them. Pray for them. Don't ever give up. And always be ready to make the best use of any and all opportunities. They will come. God answers prayer. These opportunities are the gift of our Abiding Savior - even in the midst of evil times. How does His abiding presence change how you see the world and His desire to seek and save the lost? Drop your Evangelization Team a note at this email: evangelizationteam@englishdistrict.org We look forward to hearing from you. May our Abiding Savior equip and prepare us to proclaim: Semper Paratus!! Abiding Savior, make us always ready to share the hope found in You alone!!

In Christ Alone,
Pastor John Diener
Galatians 2:20