**Sermon 6/30/19**

**Ephesians 4:25-32 & 5:8-20**

A young soldier and his commanding officer got on a train together.

The only available seats were across from an attractive young woman

             who was traveling with her grandmother.

As they engaged in pleasant conversation, the soldier and the young woman

            kept eyeing one another.

The attraction was obviously mutual.

Suddenly the train went into a tunnel and the car became pitch black.

Immediately two sounds were heard: the "smack" of a kiss,

            and the "whack" of a slap across the face.

The grandmother thought: "I can't believe he kissed my granddaughter,

          but I'm glad she gave him the slap he deserved."

The commanding officer thought, "I don't blame the boy for kissing the girl,

           but it's a shame that she missed his face and hit me instead."

The young girl thought, "I'm glad he kissed me,

           but I wish my grandmother hadn't slapped him for doing it."

As the train broke into the sunlight, the soldier could not wipe the smile off his face.

He had just seized the opportunity to kiss a pretty girl,

          and slap his commanding officer, and he had gotten away with both!

This young soldier knew how to make the most of an the opportunity.

He knew what he would like to do.

When the opportunity presented itself, he was ready to act.

That tunnel might have been the only one along the those tracks.

If he had hesitated, he would have missed his only opportunity

            to accomplish what he wished to do.

Paul urged the Ephesians to make the most of every opportunity every day.

Unfortunately, the day to day details of our lives often prevent us

           from seeing the opportunities God provides us.

We get so caught up in our deadlines, commitments, and to-do lists, our problems,

          distractions, and obstacles, that we don't notice the good we could do.

But when our hearts and minds are focused on heavenly things,

        we are prepared and ready to do grasp the opportunities we encounter.

Paul reminded the Ephesians, and all of us, to be filled with the Holy Spirit,

        to be careful and pay attention to how we live, and what we are doing.

With the Spirit's power within us we can be ready

         to make the most of every opportunity.

In the Kingdom of God, each day is a day full of opportunities,

          each day is a day full of possibilities.

The power of the Holy Spirit is the greatest unused power in the universe.

Each day is another opportunity for each of us

            to put that power to work in our own lives.

God invites us to be kind, loving, and forgiving to one another.

Why does God invite us to live his way?

Because he loves us so much.

God wants us to experience his love, and peace, and delight in life.

He teaches us to live a whole new way, his way, so we can experience his joy.

Missionaries went to the island of Madagascar

           to share the good news of God's love and forgiveness with the natives.

As they became believers and presented themselves for baptism,

          they were often asked: "What first led you to think of becoming Christians?

          Was it a particular sermon, or teaching, or the reading of God's Word?"

The answer usually was: The changed conduct of others who had become Christians,

           was what first caught their attention.

One baptismal candidate said, "I knew this man to be a thief; that one was a drunkard;

           another was very cruel and unkind to his family.

Now they are all changed.

The thief is an honest man; the drunkard is sober and respectable;

         and the other is gentle and kind in his home.

And they are all at peace with themselves and others.

They are full of joy and happiness.

There must be something important in a religion which can work such changes.

I wanted to experience that same forgiveness and joy."

God sent us his Son so could follow him and experience a whole new way of life.

What was Jesus like?

What is the picture He gives us as we look and listen to Him?

         Jesus loved the unlovable.

         Jesus forgave the unforgivable.

         Jesus made disciples and followers out of the least likely people.

         Jesus worried about people's physical hunger.

         Jesus cried when a friend died.

         Jesus took His message to the streets.

        He hung out with those who needed His message most.

And he still does.

He invites us to share in his work.

In order to experience his enthusiasm and happiness, we imitate him.

We love God with our whole hearts and our neighbors as ourselves,

             all of our neighbors.

The worst sin toward others is not to hate them,

            but to be indifferent to them.

When we do not even notice the person near us, we forget they, too,

            are God's beloved children.

God invites us to shine His light into the lives of others, whether we like them or not.

It is very helpful to remember, that no matter how we feel about someone,

          God loves them very much.

Then we can seize the opportunity to shine His light into the darkness

           of the lives of others.

Each time we do, we discover we have received a bit of light and peace

          in our lives as well.

It really comes down to whether we make the most of every opportunity

          to share God's love and shine a bit of light in the dark places of

          people's lives.

For a long time I didn't really like watching the news on TV because

             it was so depressing.

However, lately I have notice that several station close out their news broadcast

            with a "good news item".

There have been stories of surprising aging veterans with a special honor,

          and stories of many people who show up for a funeral and burial of a veteran,

          who had no family, simply so they will not be all alone.

I enjoy the stories about children:

The young girl who noticed that many people who lived on the street

          had no socks to keep their feet warm.

She spread the word around and collected many pairs of socks and

          distributed them among the homeless.

The boy who noticed how cold these people were during the winter months.

With help from family and friends and school mates,

           he collected dozens of blankets and handed them out.

I especially like the story of the very young boy who wore a policeman outfit

        and rode a battery operated police motorcycle to nursing homes.

He gave out flowers – he has distributed thousands of flowers.

But most heart-warming was the hugs he gave to all the elderly strangers.

They weren't little hugs, either.

They were loving wrap his arms around their necks and a real long hug.

It was probably the first real hug they received in many years.

The light in the eyes of these senior citizens was amazing.

Their smiles and thanks showed how important this boy's visits were to them.

I like the idea that after the news broadcast has covered the car accidents, shootings,

          kidnappings, fires, and political problems,

          they end on a brighter, happier, more loving story.

Instead of only concentrating only on the bad things in this world,

          they find something good to show.

It does make a big difference.

It is a little example of setting our hearts and minds on heavenly things

          instead of only earthly things.

What a difference it can make when we look to our Heavenly Father,

          imitate Jesus, and let the Power of the Holy Spirit fill us, and direct us.

AMEN