

## Thoughtlessness Leads to Ingratitude and Uneven Paths

Sermon for the 18<sup>th</sup> Sunday after Trinity

Sermon Text: Ephesians 5:15-20



*Look carefully then how you walk, not as unwise but as wise,<sup>16</sup> making the best use of the time because the days are evil.<sup>17</sup> Therefore do not be foolish, but understand what the will of the Lord is.<sup>18</sup> And do not get drunk with wine, for that is debauchery, but be filled with the Spirit,<sup>19</sup> addressing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody to the Lord with your heart,<sup>20</sup> giving thanks always and for everything to God the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.*

Why was Jina Mahsa Amini killed? The Iranian Kurdish woman was killed by the Iranian police a couple weeks ago for not properly wearing her headscarf. As a result, there are still intense demonstrations throughout Iran to this day. Surely it isn't just about a little headscarf made from cloth! Why? Whenever we are faced with something so terrible or with something so evil, we ask ourselves this question – why? Why must so many people die in bombing attacks? What's the point? Is it just about power? Is it just about money? If you were to ask Paul, he would have a clear answer to this question. Paul would say: "It's about what's inside a person! It's about a person's nature which is fundamentally evil." In the letter to the Ephesians, from which I just read, Paul makes it clear. He talks again and again about the Old and New Self. The Old Self is contrary to everything good. The Old Self only produces what Satan and his desires dictate to him. So, the Old Self is fundamentally evil and therefore only produces evil. The consequences that we always see are exactly the same to this day: bloodshed, hate, and the senseless killing of many people. We want to distance ourselves from all these things. We don't want to do the things that the Old Self does, but we want to do the things that grow out of the New Creature and out of the new life in Christ. We want to be different, and we want to live differently. We want to be Christians and that's why we ask the question: "What does it mean to be a Christian?" A Christian describes his Christianity in this way: "I was baptized a Protestant as a baby. But I didn't pray regularly nor read the Bible regularly and had no special interest in Christianity. I just tried to be a good person." I think there are many Christians who think this way. They are mindless Christians. For them, Christianity is a tradition, something one does out of habit – then Christianity only plays a role in baptism, marriage, and funerals. That would be a mindless Christianity. One can imagine such a Christianity a little bit like a bicycle wheel that isn't centered properly. Some of you also ride bicycles and will understand this well. If the bicycle wheel is bent out of shape or wobbles, the tire will drag on the left and right side of the brake blocks and you will have a bumpy and rough ride over the asphalt. On such a day, you would like to throw the bike into the corner and not ride at all. That's how it unfortunately is with Christians when Christ Himself is not the central point. For example, if we understand Christianity only in terms of being nice to other people, then we no longer have Christ as our center. And then everything goes wrong. We made Christianity into a tire that doesn't run in a circular motion, but constantly wobbles back and forth. And because of that, many people no longer know what it means to be a Christian. It's no wonder then, that some ask: Why do you want to pay church tax at all? Why do you want to do anything Christian at all? What do you get out of it? What's the point? Paul wants us to think about who we are. He doesn't want us to be mindless Christians and that's why he says that we should be careful about what we do. To do this, he uses the word "Akribi" in the description – that means that we are extremely focused on what we do: "*Look carefully then how you walk, not as unwise but as wise,<sup>16</sup> making the best use of the time, because the days are evil...*" Paul tells us here that we should think about who we are with the greatest concentration and when we think about who we are, it has consequences for our entire life and comes to a beautiful climax in which we praise and thank God!

It is interesting that in both the German and the English language, the word **Thinking (Denken)** has a similarity in origin and meaning to the word **Thankfulness (Dank)**. The original German word for Thankfulness was "danc" and it had the following meaning: "think or I think." In summary, we can say: a grateful spirit arises where

someone thinks. Does that mean whoever **thinks** becomes **grateful**? Conversely, does it mean that whoever is **ungrateful** has not **thought**? Not reflected? This little play on words points in an interesting direction, which is: **Thinking** and **Thankfulness** are related to one another. You can observe this in everyday life too: imagine someone gives you something and you, without a single word or thought, place the gift in the corner or maybe even throw it directly into the garbage. That would be an offense to the giver and we would describe such a person as ungrateful. Such a person did not think and therefore became ungrateful. But the same can be observed in many other things in our lives and especially in our life as Christians. If I am a Christian, I know that I don't belong to myself, but to God. That I stand here today with arms, legs, eyes, and a head, is a special gift from God. I can think about how much I appreciate this body. I can be grateful for it. I can say: "God, You have given me everything! I thank You for it!" Or I can thoughtlessly waste everything. So, you can just let your life slip through your fingers without thinking too much about where we come from and where we are going. Paul then explains how one can live so mindlessly and specifically mentions binge drinking. That doesn't mean that Paul is against all wine or alcoholic beverages, but he just wants to point out the ones who aren't thinking. There is a danger that you simply indulge in the enjoyment of alcohol. You let yourself be swept away by alcohol... you get drunk so that you don't have to think and therefore can't give thanks. You just drown the thankfulness before it has a chance to form. And at the end of this path is the poisoning of the body with alcohol and the relationships between people are often poisoned as well. So we can say that the path without **Thinking** as well as the path without **Thankfulness** leads to despair! However, this is not only the case with alcohol addiction, but it is also the same with many other things – we can get carried away by the many worries in our world, we can get carried away by hate or greed. The end is always the same – a poisoned life without thankfulness and without faith.

Going back to our illustration of the bent bicycle tire, we would not be happy Christians – we would be constantly tossed back and forth. At the end of this same path is still only hopelessness and aimlessness. Paul wants the exact opposite. He wants to get to the essence of being a Christian. What defines us as Christians? What makes us special? What makes us special is who we are. We are God's children! That means that Jesus is within us. And just as Jesus stood in the middle of society and was the Light of the World there, the same Jesus also stands in the middle of our lives and shines His Life and Light into every dark corner of life. Jesus shines in me and in you. And that's why we can radiate Jesus and His Light into the whole world. That is a bold sentence! And it shows that we have a goal. We have a goal only because Jesus Himself is the source. We stand upon the exact Words that Jesus promised us. When we are baptized in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, we are God's children. We essentially belong to God. And because God's Spirit belongs to us through baptism, we know that God is in us and also works through us. He also works in us! And these thoughts lead to gratitude. In this gratitude, I never remain alone, and I always have a future. That's why I confidently take my fellow Christians' hands in mine and sing a joyful song of praise, even in the midst of the many terrible things in this world. <sup>19</sup> *addressing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody to the Lord with your heart,* <sup>20</sup> *giving thanks always and for everything to God the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ. Amen*