

Scripture Reading Ephesians 5:15-20

Be careful how you live not as fools, but as those who are wise (15). Let the Holy Spirit fill and control you (18). Always give thanks for everything to God the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ (20).

In the light of these 3 verses I want to start with a comparison between two animals we Canadians know very well – the beaver and the otter. The beaver, works throughout the day, chewing on trees, toppling them to create dams in flowing streams. 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 beaver neighbors.

Both animals live about the same length of time, but you have to believe that otters enjoy life just a little 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.

Question is am I a beaver or an otter?

How will we describe our ministry and life together at Knox – beaver or 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 “building dams” that they never get around enjoying life. During Covid I sometimes wondered if we are more beaver like in our ministry, go, go, go all the time, “chewing off trees” to build our church dams. The beaver mentality can become very exhausting especially in the church if this is all there is – meeting deadlines, meeting goals, meeting budgets, etc., all the modern day church stuff, go, go all the time. Maybe Covid made us realize this is not what the Christian life should be all about, we should never lose sight of joy and enjoyment and otter playfulness in our life together as a church family.

My spiritual director during my intermission in 2018 one day said to me: Johan among the many questions our Lord might ask us when we arrive in heaven will be this one: Johan did you enjoy your life journey? I want to live more otter like.

Our Christian identity found in our relationship with Jesus enables us to be thankful for everything and not live like fools, but live lives filled and controlled by the Holy Spirit.

A cross shaped life doesn't make us better than others it makes us "different."

Otters are not better than beavers – they are different.

When Paul invites us to live *wisely/differently*, he might have in the back of his mind the link to the wisdom literature of the Old Testament; books like Proverbs and Ecclesiastes. Please read and study these OT books and you will see how they give practical advice on living wisely and differently.

Just one quote dear to me from Ecclesiastes 3:11 – 13 Yet God has made everything beautiful for its own time. He has planted eternity in the human heart, but even so, people cannot see the whole scope of God's work from beginning to end. So I concluded there is nothing better than to be happy and enjoy ourselves as long as we can. And people should eat and drink and enjoy the fruits of their labor, for these are gifts from God (NLT).

God's word inspired by the Holy Spirit is like the owner's manual we receive when we buy a new car.

I can choose to run and use my car as I choose rather than in ways that are consistent with the owner's manual. I can choose to exercise my freedom and refuse to fill up with gas or take my car to the dealership for services and oil changes. An attitude: I know what's best for my car. But, of course if I don't fill up with gas, the car will stop running. The manufacturer knows that if I don't bring my car for the recommended services at some point I will deal with the consequences like break pads wearing out and failing catastrophically. If I never

service my car or have the oil changed, well don't be surprised if you have major and expensive breakdowns.

In a similar way some people ignores God's owner manual – Scripture - and then there is the real danger choosing foolishly (17).

What makes for a wise joyful otter life?

Let the Holy Spirit fill and control you (18) and interesting, one of the joys of a Spirit filled life is that the Spirit enables us to sing! Then you will sing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs among yourselves, making music to the Lord in your hearts (19).

The Holy Spirit binds us together in joyful worship every Sunday and wants us to take our joyful worship back home, back to our workplace and into our neighborhood and society.

Worship should be more like "otter enjoyment" of God rather than "beaver business".

Paul doesn't see personal and congregational singing as going through liturgical motions when we gather for worship. No singing, whether aloud or in your heart, is an excellent way of actually practicing and proclaiming your faith – o how I wish we can sing again!

Singing is like keeping your garden well stocked with strong, sturdy flowers and shrubs so your garden don't grow weeds. If you don't want your mind and heart to go wandering off into the realms of darkness, one of the best ways to do this is by singing – music moves us in ways the spoken word can't.

Music is for entertainment most of the time but when it comes to our spiritual lives and joyful worship, our hymns are not entertainment; they are instruction, consolation, and hope. Our hymns move us to enjoy the gift of life that God has given us so we can joyfully continue the ministry of Christ in our world.