**Sermon for Proper 13-C**

**Bethlehem Lutheran Church, Aiken, South Carolina**

08-03-25

Ecclesiastes 1:2, 12–14; 2:18–26

Solomon was the son, and the successor, of David, the king of Israel. Upon becoming king, Solomon prayed to God for wisdom, and God answered his prayer by bestowing upon him such wisdom that no man, before or since, has ever been so gifted.

When Solomon, the wisest man who ever lived, contemplated the world, and mankind’s lot, he declared it all vanity; emptiness. *2Vanity of vanities, says the Preacher, vanity of vanities! All is vanity.*”

Now, this was not Solomon’s final conclusion; these were not his last words on the subject. Solomon was not a nihilist; one who would summarize the facts of life as that life is pointless, and then you die. Yet, this is exactly Solomon’s summary of a life lived without faith in God.

Before mankind’s fall, life was most certainly not vanity and chasing the wind. Adam was perfectly content, and the work that he’d been given to do was his pleasure. Life was, literally, perfect; especially when God introduced him to Eve. Together, they lacked nothing.

But you know what happened. They rebelled, sin entered the world, and with it, futility, mortality, pain, suffering; in other words, vanity.

 For Adam, work would become a drudgery. God declared “In the sweat of your face shall you eat your bread, until you return to the dust.”

For Eve, bearing and nurturing children, being a support to her husband, managing the home, would now come with pain and sorrows. The very order of creation; with man as the head, and woman as his helper, would become ever more tainted, twisted, and begrudged by fallen mankind, as it is to this very day.

Because of God’s judgment against sin, the creation is passing away. Because of God’s judgment against sin, death reigns supreme.

 Because of sin, work is a drudgery. Even work that we do because we want to; because we enjoy the work, brings with it frustrations, and saps our energy.

 Life in the fallen world is a life of bearing all kinds of crosses. The goals that we set are often like a mirage; always in the distance, always just out of reach.

 Our dreams and personal achievements somehow lose their shine; they don’t seem so special, once they’re realized. Every responsibility that we gain becomes yet another cross to bear.

As Solomon observed, all that we acquire over a lifetime eventually goes to someone else. Is that all there is to life? If so, then what’s the point? Vanity of vanities, all is vanity; that is, for the one who is living for the world. But you know better.

You know that the world, as St. Paul has put it, was subjected to futility not willingly, but because of him who subjected it in hope. God, who pronounced futility upon a fallen world, is also the one who declared how he himself would resolve the problem of evil in the world.

God sent his only begotten Son into this vale of tears in order to redeem it. To fallen mankind, with whom God was greatly displeased, he presented Jesus, and declared “This is my Son, my beloved, in whom I am well pleased.”

 Jesus is the Christ, the promised Redeemer. He came and suffered our eternal judgment in our place, being crucified as the all-availing sacrifice for mankind. Raised again from the dead, he showed himself victorious over sin, and death, and the devil.

 He took our guilt upon his shoulders, and gave us his innocence. He removed from us eternal judgment, and gave to us eternal life.

Now, no longer is life, with all of its frustrations, pains, injustices and woes, a pointless exercise. You have something beyond this fleeting, superficial world. You have the promise of eternity in paradise with Jesus Christ the Lord.

 Although this body shall return to the dust, as all things in this world must pass away, yet Jesus Christ shall, one day, raise you from the dead, and welcome you, and all Christians into the new, fully restored, eternal creation.

The future for everyone whose faith is in Christ; your future, is life without death; life without drudgery; life as it was originally meant to be.

Meanwhile, you have a life to live here and now; a life that is hidden in Christ; a life of repentance for sins, faith in God’s forgiveness, and hope in the future paradise to come.

The Lord is using you in your life to help take care of his creation, and provide for the needs of others. You are his witness to the world, often in ways that you are not even aware.

The Spirit of Christ moves you, and changes your perspectives, ever more toward God’s will, and ever further away from the selfishness of our own sinful desires.

The more that we consider that everything that we have is from God, then the more thankful we become, and the more we find godly joy and contentment in our callings and life circumstances, recognizing that God works to turn even our suffering for our good.

Though we are but sinful, mortal people in a sinful, mortal world, by the grace of God, we believe the Gospel; the good news that, while we deserve no good thing from God, he has given us forgiveness, eternal life, and every good thing through his Son, Jesus Christ, purely out of undeserved love and mercy toward us.

This makes all of the difference. his exposes as a lie the idea that this life is pointless, and that nothing really matters, as one of Satan’s deadly deceptions meant to turn us away from the truth.

 The truth is Jesus Christ, the Word of God made flesh, who is the Author of life, and gives life its meaning.

 With an abiding faith in Christ, it becomes our joy to render our lives a service to him, out of thankfulness for all that he has done, and continues to do, for us.

 Dear beloved, redeemed child of God, your life is not vanity; it is a holy service to the Lord. Because you are in Christ, God is well pleased with you. Amen.