

Ecc. 1:2, 12-14 2:18-26

² *Vanity of vanities, says the Preacher,
vanity of vanities! All is vanity.*

¹² *I the Preacher have been king over Israel in Jerusalem.* ¹³ *And I applied my heart to seek and to search out by wisdom all that is done under heaven. It is an unhappy business that God has given to the children of man to be busy with.* ¹⁴ *I have seen everything that is done under the sun, and behold, all is vanity and a striving after wind.*

¹⁸ *I hated all my toil in which I toil under the sun, seeing that I must leave it to the man who will come after me,* ¹⁹ *and who knows whether he will be wise or a fool? Yet he will be master of all for which I toiled and used my wisdom under the sun. This also is vanity.* ²⁰ *So I turned about and gave my heart up to despair over all the toil of my labors under the sun,* ²¹ *because sometimes a person who has toiled with wisdom and knowledge and skill must leave everything to be enjoyed by someone who did not toil for it. This also is vanity and a great evil.* ²² *What has a man from all the toil and striving of heart with which he toils beneath the sun?* ²³ *For all his days are full of sorrow, and his work is a vexation. Even in the night his heart does not rest. This also is vanity.*

²⁴ *There is nothing better for a person than that he should eat and drink and find enjoyment in his toil. This also, I saw, is from the hand of God,* ²⁵ *for apart from him who can eat or who can have enjoyment?* ²⁶ *For to the one who pleases him God has given wisdom and knowledge and joy, but to the sinner he has given the business of gathering and collecting, only to give to one who pleases God. This also is vanity and a striving after wind.*

In our text today, Solomon reminds of a life we all know well. A life of toil, despair, exhaustion, anxiety, fear and a sense of never having enough. Solomon knew all too well life under the Law, or as our text refers to it “under the sun”, which is life on Earth after the Fall, a life of idolatry and false worship. As King over Israel, he speaks here in Ecclesiastes as the Preacher or the one declaring to the assembly or church. He begins by pronouncing a verdict and judgement on all that is in this life apart from Christ, as the fallen man.

*“Vanity of vanities, says the Preacher,
vanity of vanities! All is vanity.” Ecc. 1:2*

Solomon’s the idea of vanity as a striving or chasing after something that you can never acquire. This is the fruit of false worship, or idolatry. As he describes in vs. 14 of Ch. 1 *“a striving after the wind”*, an impossible goal never delivering what it promises.

The Fall of Adam and Eve affected not only humanity, infecting us all with Original sin, but all of Creation itself, affecting our vocations and relationship to Creation and one another as well. Original sin affected everything *“under the sun”*.

God told Adam,
"cursed is the ground because of you;
in pain you shall eat of it all the days of your life;
thorns and thistles it shall bring forth for you;" Gen. 3:17-18

Solomon describes this when he says, "What has a man from all the toil and striving of heart with which he toils beneath the sun?"²³ For all his days are full of sorrow, and his work is a vexation". Solomon sees mankind working, climbing, and falling into the same pattern of idolatry and futility he has observed and lived. No matter how wise or foolish, rich or poor the results are the same in the end, and yet people keep striving. Sinful mankind "under the sun" wants more and more, never satisfied or content, as this is the result of **all** idolatry and false worship, "vanity, vanity, all is vanity."

The commandments are written on our hearts and we have even perhaps memorized them: **The First Commandment: Thou shalt have no other gods.** Which Luther further explains in the Large Catechism explains this way:

What does it mean to have a god? or, what is God? 2] Answer: A god means that from which we are to expect all good and to which we are to take refuge in all distress, so that to have a God is nothing else than to trust and believe Him from the [whole] heart; as I have often said that the confidence and faith of the heart alone make both God and an idol. 3] If your faith and trust be right, then is your god also true; and, on the other hand, if your trust be false and wrong, then you have not the true God; for these two belong together, faith and God. That now, I say, upon which you set your heart and put your trust is properly your god.

All of mankind is born into sin, and we are insatiable, with an appetite for more, so we work and work and work, until it kills us. We believe the Satanic lie that somehow and someday our work and striving will get us there, because we are tempted to look to our possessions as god rather than gifts from God. Satan tempted Jesus in the wilderness with the same thing, be He was victorious "Again, the devil took him to a very high mountain and showed him all the kingdoms of the world and their glory.⁹ And he said to him, "All these I will give you, if you will fall down and worship me."¹⁰ Then Jesus said to him, "Be gone, Satan! For it is written,

*"You shall worship the Lord your God
and him only shall you serve."* (Matt 4:8-10)

The toil and striving for the things of this earth is clearly not the true worship of God, but of Satan, who comes not to give gifts, but to steal, kill and destroy. Solomon reminds us, "to the sinner he has given the business of gathering and collecting" and this collecting in our text is nothing but what will return to the dust, as Jesus warns in Matt. 6:19,
"Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal," For this too is vanity, however, JESUS' WORK ON THE CROSS GIVES US JOY IN OUR VOCATIONS and freedom from this vanity.

Solomon proclaims as clear as day the results of our efforts apart from the work of Christ for us. The good gifts of God's creation can become the idols of our own striving, no longer being received as gifts, but endless pursuits to bring us what we think we need. Advertising firms and marketers make billions off of this, rather than looking to God, we look to his gifts as gods. Paul explains it in Romans 1 like this, *"they exchanged the truth about God for a lie and worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator"* If this race for success and collection of more things is all that there is, then as Solomon says *"There is nothing better for a person than that he should eat and drink and find enjoyment in his toil."* Under the Law alone the fatalistic Epicurean or Hedonistic thought actually makes sense to us, because that is how the Old Adam thinks and works apart from the Gospel. This is the rich fool Jesus speaks about in our Gospel text today, who says to himself, *"Soul, you have ample goods laid up for many years; relax, eat, drink, be merry."* (Luke 12:16-19) Jesus makes this man's folly obvious in his parable, so that we cry out like the Apostle Paul *"Who will deliver me from this body of death?"* Thanks be to God that JESUS' WORK ON THE CROSS GIVES US JOY IN OUR VOCATIONS and freedom from this vanity.

Now, how do we get from this endless striving to *"laying up for yourselves treasures on earth"* or *"being rich toward God"* as Jesus puts it? Our Lord, through Solomon's words, delivers to us the answer to this vanity as he declares, *"This also, I saw, is from the hand of God, ²⁵for apart from him who can eat or who can have enjoyment? ²⁶For to the one who pleases him God has given wisdom and knowledge and joy.* The answer to our real dilemma is not through striving or working which is false worship and despair, but true worship is a life received from the hand of God. It is the life of faith. True worship is this: Receive the full forgiveness of all of your sins. Then we give thanks and rejoice in all the gifts God gives us every day. Food, clothing, family, work in which there are continuing opportunities to serve and help our neighbor. Hear the words in our epistle text once again about how the Gospel now frees us from a life of vanity, *"For you have died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God."* (Col. 3:3)

The cross of Jesus appeared to be the vainest and most futile thing ever. He died abandoned by all his followers, mocked by Jews and Gentiles alike, forsaken by our Heavenly Father because He was all my sin and yours. And what was left in His estate when He breathed out His last? Nothing. It appeared at the surface to be vanity, a complete striving after the wind. But there was much more--His Body and Blood. His Spirit breathed out as He died. The complete forgiveness of all sin. It's everything for you, for me. Jesus answered our vanity by taking it all into Himself to win for us His place. What a glorious exchange! You are a child of our heavenly Father through the adoption by blood through baptism into Christ Jesus' death and resurrection. And you receive the full inheritance of all that Jesus' won, by receiving all He had left to give: His Body and Blood given and shed for you for the forgiveness of all your sins. Because Jesus took on the vanity of death and conquered it by His resurrection, now we are freed from earning anything! We're freed as the princes and princesses of an eternal kingdom knowing that our reign has already begun. This life of *"wisdom and knowledge and joy"* is Christ in us, pure gift. This is true worship, *"In this is love, not that we have loved God but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins."* In contrast to grasping at the wind, we receive the true Body and Blood of our Lord Jesus in His Holy Supper, and His physical words of absolution,

spoken by the pastor in the Gospel and Absolution. This is not vanity, but objective gifts, not a feeling inside us or a result of anything in us at all, but real bread and real wine put into our mouth and into our ears and water on our skin, so that we can know beyond a shadow of a doubt that God is truly FOR US and we are clean! JESUS' WORK ON THE CROSS GIVES US JOY IN OUR VOCATIONS and freedom from the vanity of the Fall.

"you have been raised with Christ" Col. 3:1 declares, this is for you and me. We are now free to receive these gifts of Creation, vocation, and every tangible gift in your life because God in Christ Jesus loves you and has raised you, a new creation, forgiven. *"He has loved us."* That's true for Richard Dawkins (or any atheist) whom our Lord gives food and safe travel to, because he loves him! That's true for the enemies of the church. They have food and clothing and rest and all sorts of good things, because God in Christ loves them too. Without faith, we worry and fret and think we're the source of all the good in our life. The Old Adam tells us that we must do something NOW, but true faith knows the true God and the truth of that God: He loves ME. Not because of what I have or haven't done, but because Jesus died for my sins and bought me from endless vanity to life as an eternal child of God. This frees me to enjoy all that my Lord gives me, from His hand in faith, trusting in the Gospel of sins forgiven on account of Christ alone. Jesus frees you and I to work, eat, drink, and serve our neighbor through the vocations or stations in which God has placed us. Not striving against the wind or in vanity, but in faith. JESUS' WORK ON THE CROSS GIVES US JOY IN OUR VOCATIONS and freedom from the vanity of the Fall. All that we have, which is from the hand of God, we see as for our good and for the good of our neighbor, and not as meaningless but meaningful.

We hear again the words of the Psalmist giving thanks for the good news of God's love for us:

*"Make a joyful noise to the LORD, all the earth!
Serve the LORD with gladness!
Come into his presence with singing!*

*Know that the LORD, he is God!
It is he who made us, and we are his;
we are his people, and the sheep of his pasture.*

*Enter his gates with thanksgiving,
and his courts with praise!
Give thanks to him; bless his name!*

*For the LORD is good;
his steadfast love endures forever,
and his faithfulness to all generations."*

In the Name of Jesus,
Amen.