

Ecclesiastes 1:2,12-14,2:18-23

Luke 12:13-21

Colossians 3:1-11

“Ours mouths shall speak wisdom;
the meditations of our hearts
shall be understanding.” AMEN!

It's all vanity. Smoke and mist;
like steam that rises off boiling water.

It's all smoke, mist, and steam.

Here for a moment and then vanished.

The Teacher knows that the day exists only
for a moment and then it disappears.

So too are humans, with their efforts
to secure advantages and luxuries for pleasure.

They're fleeting and will evaporate. (Pause)

The wise Teacher, in Ecclesiastes, leads us to wonder,

“Why was he so discouraged?”

Was he bothered by the fact that he is going to die?

Everyone knows that no one lives forever.

When we live long enough

we each understand
that life is short.

A generation comes and a generation goes and
we all know the possessions we accumulate
can't be taken with us when it's time to die.

I think that's the key to the Teacher's lament really.

That he can't take his stuff with him.

All of the things for which he has toiled to accumulate;
everything must be left to a successor
who hasn't done the work
to achieve "the things."

This leads the Teacher to despair.

One can't help but think that the Teacher has
come to overvalue his wealth.

Who among us cannot relate to that!?!

Wealth has gotten him (and me) out of a lot of jams.

Helped him live comfortably and given him
the luxury of worrying about life's finality
instead of his next meal or if he'll have shelter.

Perhaps he thought his wealth could
save him from death.

Like some Christians today in North America,
we live a life more like Frank Sinatra's song,
"I Did it My Way," than we do
the hymn "Amazing Grace."

Many have bought into "the one who dies
with the most toys, wins," lie.

One day though the great equalizer humbles
even the most greedy, egocentric,
and most-shallow person.

When we are honest we know the we are
like the old country music hit sometimes,

you know "Looking for Love in All the Wrong Places."

But, everyone (one way or another) comes
to understand that excessive wealth,
greed, and stockpiling possessions is,
in truth, looking for love, or meaning,
in all the wrong places. (Pause)

But then something happens...

Jesus comes alongside and walks with us.

We start seeing that what we have is a gift, and
when we can keep our eye on that truth,
then you yourself begin to see

yourself as a gift, and you yourself become a giver.

I've met some amazing givers
inside and outside the church.

I have been inspired by them.

From these givers, I've become a better giver.

It is possible to break greed's hold. (Pause)

I know that you know, compared to almost
every other country in the world,
we Americans are rich, wealthy, and
blessed with many gifts.

What are we to do with so much
that's been gifted to our possession?

Some want to hoard it and not utilize what
this nation has to help others.

This is exactly the behavior that Jesus denounces.

Possessions and gifts aren't the issue.

Greed and hoarding the excess bounty
are the behaviors that Jesus condemns.

Possessions and gifts of wealth are not anathema,
that is, they are not to be hated or avoided.

It's the anxious holding onto them,
the claiming that they are not to be shared
is what Jesus warns the crowd (and us) about.
(Pause)

Siblings in Christ, I am guilty of greed.

I might not be piling up all the toys,
but I've got some of those, too.

I'm guilty of greed that is born out of insecurity
for the what might happen tomorrow.

Oh, today, I'm sound.
I have plenty, today.

I'm satisfied, but what will happen tomorrow?

Will I still have enough tomorrow?

It's exactly what the rich fool wonders
about in the parable.

Blessed with an abundant harvest.

More than he knows what to do with and
in the abundance of gifts he decides
to keep it all for himself.

He tears down perfectly good barns in order
to build larger ones because he wants
to keep it all for himself.

Like me, he wants to remain in control,
but you can't sing "I Did it My Way" and
"Amazing Grace" at the funeral.

If it really is grace, if it's really a gift,
then it's meant to be shared and
left for God to control, not for us to hoard.
(Pause)

Jesus said, "Be on guard against all kinds of greed."

Our government must hear these words and
take them to heart and then to action
because it's given itself over to greed.
Withdrawing aid to the poorest nations of the world
because we feel taken advantage of is a sin.

Taking medicine out of the hands of organizations
that use it to help eradicate disease that runs
rampant over impoverished people is a sin.

“One’s life does not consist in
the abundance of possessions.”

The Teacher, Jesus, said that.

You know what else is a great teacher?

Death.

Pick any person heading to work.

Their needs are met.

They’ve got drive, a good home, and
family that loves them-yet there’s
this feeling inside.

Something’s just not right and they don’t know why.

Let’s just say that person has a heart attack and
wakes up in the ICU wing of the hospital and
they come to themselves and realize
they’ve been sleepwalking through life.

Driven by the “Greed is Good” lie.

The realization of mortality has turned
their eye to giftedness. (Pause)

Some might say, “But pastor,
I hardly make any income.”

I’ve been there, too.

As a pastor, I have learned that a person’s income
has little correlation on how much
a person gives away.

I mean to say that it’s not a matter of
the more someone has the more they give away
or the less someone has the less they give.

No, giving is related to something else.

It has to do with having an awareness, a knowing,
that what we have is a gift.

No matter the amount.

The knowing that what I have is not my own,
but a gift from God.

It is this Gospel News that can transform the greed

which grips us and our nation.

It is gratitude that keeps us from
storing up treasures for ourselves
and brings us to become rich toward God.

AMEN!