

2015_10_11 Pentecost 20
Ascension Lutheran Church, Batavia IL
Pastor David Pfeiffer

**To Receive Your Daily Bread With Thanksgiving:
THIS IS THE GIFT OF GOD**

Grace, mercy, and peace to you from God our Father, and from His Son Jesus Christ.
Amen.

Imagine that I gave you a hand full of sand and told you to take it home with you today. I want you to hold on to it tightly and never let go. How long do you think it would last? Outside with the wind blowing, Into the car, home to the dinner table, into the bathroom ... Could you do any of the stuff you normally like doing? This sort of thing is called vanity. The word vanity means emptiness, it is meaningless, it is hopeless, it is foolish. Vanity is emptiness, nothing more than a handful of sand.

In our sermon today, we will be talking about a king who discovered the vanity of trying to hang on to riches. The text we'll be reading was written by a king named Solomon. He was a powerful king who ruled a long time ago in the great city of Jerusalem. He was famous around the world for his wisdom and riches. He ruled Israel, the same place where Jesus was from, and he expanded the nation to make it the largest and greatest it would ever be. And yet, now he is old. He looks back on all that he has done, he thinks back on all that he has accomplished, and do you know what he says, "It is vanity." It is empty. Trying to hang on to riches forever is pointless.

Because what happens on the last day when you die and Jesus comes to raise up your body? What do you think you'll have to take with you into heaven? Your toys? Your gold and silver and money? Your house? It is not that riches are sinful or that money is really the problem. It is the love of money that is the problem. The problem is what is in our hearts, not our hands. Today we will learn what will really last. We pray every Sunday in the Lord's prayer. "Our Father who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name, thy kingdom come, thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven..." What comes next? ["Give us this day our daily bread." This is the fourth petition. And receiving your daily bread, is everything God gives you for your body and life. And the reason why we pray this is so that we would learn to be thankful to God for what he has given us. The bread won't last, but a thankful, joyful heart will. To receive your daily bread with thanksgiving is the gift of God.

Ecclesiastes 5:10-20

¹⁰ *He who loves silver will not be satisfied with silver; Nor he who loves abundance, with increase. This also is vanity.*

¹¹ *When goods increase, They increase who eat them; So what profit have the owners Except to see them with their eyes?*

¹² *The sleep of a laboring man is sweet, Whether he eats little or much; But the abundance of the rich will not permit him to sleep.*

¹³ *There is a severe evil which I have seen under the sun: Riches kept for their owner to his hurt.*

¹⁴ *But those riches perish through misfortune; When he begets a son, there is nothing in his hand.*

¹⁵ *As he came from his mother's womb, naked shall he return, To go as he came; And he shall take nothing from his labor Which he may carry away in his hand.*

¹⁶ *And this also is a severe evil — Just exactly as he came, so shall he go. And what profit has he who has labored for the wind?*

¹⁷ *All his days he also eats in darkness, And he has much sorrow and sickness and anger.*

¹⁸ *Here is what I have seen: It is good and fitting for one to eat and drink, and to enjoy the good of all his labor in which he toils under the sun all the days of his life which God gives him; for it is his heritage. ¹⁹ As for every man to whom God has given riches and wealth, and given him power to eat of it, to receive his heritage and rejoice in his labor — this is the gift of God.*

²⁰ *For he will not dwell unduly on the days of his life, because God keeps him busy with the joy of his heart.*

Blessed are they who hear the word of God and keep it. Amen.

Lord, grant us Your Holy Spirit to know and understand your word. Amen.

So how much is enough? That was the title to the story I read on a Jimmy John's sandwich shop. If you've ever been into a Jimmy John's sandwich shop, you've probably noticed quotable quotes on their wall; they are meant to keep you occupied while you wait for your sandwich. This picture told the parable of the fisherman and the banker. The title was: "How much is enough."

The American investment banker was at the pier of a small coastal Mexican village when a small boat with just one fisherman docked. Inside the small boat were several large fin tuna. The American complimented the Mexican on the quality of his fish and asked how long it took to catch them.

The Mexican replied, "only a little while."

The American then asked why he didn't stay out longer and catch more fish?

The Mexican said he had enough to support his family's immediate needs.

The American then asked, "but what do you do with the rest of your time?"

The Mexican fisherman said, "I sleep late, fish a little, play with my children, take siesta with my wife, Maria, stroll into the village each evening where I sip wine and play guitar with my amigos, I have a full and busy life."

The American scoffed, "I am a Harvard MBA and could help you. You should spend more time fishing and with the proceeds, buy a bigger boat, and with the proceeds from the bigger boat you could buy several boats. Eventually, you would have a fleet of fishing boats. Instead of selling your catch to a middleman you would sell directly to the processor, eventually opening your own cannery. You would control the product, processing and distribution. You would need to leave this small coastal fishing village and move to Mexico City, then LA and eventually NYC where you will run your expanding enterprise."

The Mexican fisherman asked, "But, how long will this take?"

To which the American replied, "15-20 years."

"But what then?"

The American laughed and said that's the best part. "When the time is right you would announce an IPO and sell your company stock to the public and become very rich, you would make millions."

"Millions?" asked the fisherman, "Then what?"

The American said, "Then you would retire. Move to a small coastal fishing village where you would sleep late, fish a little, play with your kids, take siesta with your wife, stroll to the village in the evening, sip wine and play your guitar with your amigos!"

(Author Unknown)

How much is enough? That is the question that the king has in mind as he looks back on his life. Solomon is known the world over for his strategic military decisions, for his wise political and economic decisions, and for his great wealth. Yet, as he looks back on it all, he recognizes, it was never enough.

10 He who loves silver will not be satisfied with silver; Nor he who loves abundance, with increase. This also is vanity.

11 When goods increase, They increase who eat them; So what profit have the owners Except to see them with their eyes?

It is like hanging onto sand. He calls it emptiness. Vanity. An empty pursuit. And why? Because it is never enough. Even after increasing his wealth beyond our wildest dreams: 1 Kings 4 says he forty thousand stalls of horses for his chariots and twelve thousand horsemen. Kings of other nations would bring him tributes, just to keep peace with him. Yet even after all that, he still is not satisfied. Because even as his riches increased, so did the people who were needed to oversee them and so did the people who consumed them.

And look at us. Here we have one of the richest nations in the world, and yet what do we do most of all? Complain. We complain that there are not enough jobs – at least not enough high paying jobs. We complain that our government is too big. We complain that immigrants want to come and live here. We complain because even when we have more than enough, it is still not enough. For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil.

Notice what Paul writes in 1 Timothy 6 – it is not money that is the problem, but the “love of money.” For, Paul writes, godliness with contentment is great gain. In other words, it is ok to be a Mexican fisherman. To receive your daily bread with thanksgiving: This is the gift of God.

12 The sleep of a laboring man is sweet, Whether he eats little or much; But the abundance of the rich will not permit him to sleep.

Sleep is one of the best measures of contentment. When things distress us, worry us, leave us unsatisfied or bitter – it often becomes difficult to sleep. Think of all that Solomon had to think of when he lay down to bed. His mind troubled about the threats of the surrounding nations. His mind worried about conspiracies within his own palace. His stomach more than filled, but never content.

On the other he recognizes the sweetness of the working man. That even though he sit down with his family to a meal of bread and water, he sleeps soundly that night, for he receives his daily bread with thanksgiving.

14 But those riches perish through misfortune; When he begets a son, there is nothing in his hand.

15 As he came from his mother's womb, naked shall he return, To go as he came; And he shall take nothing from his labor Which he may carry away in his hand.

16 And this also is a severe evil— Just exactly as he came, so shall he go. And what profit has he who has labored for the wind?

Egyptian kings were known for their riches. Defined by their success. In a way it was a part of their identity and even their religion. So when a Pharaoh was buried, he would be mummified in expensive linens and placed into a tomb along with all his riches. The Pharaohs believed that when they reached the afterlife, they would be able to take their treasures with them. They wanted to preserve their body and their riches so as to maintain their identity in the afterlife.

And yet, what happens to those riches? In 2014 a tomb of a famous king dating to 3600 B.C. was discovered in middle Egypt. And do you know what they found in that tomb: nothing but scattered bones. The riches had been plundered by tomb robbers. The mummified remains had been torn through. And nothing was left except scattered bones.

What is it that we cling to so tightly as if to take it with us in the life to come? What are all these things we possess, but a handful of sand? And that is what Solomon realizes. That those riches and power he worked so hard to attain, will be left to perish when he is gone.

He calls it a sickening evil. "This is a severe evil under the sun." A more accurate translation would be: a sickening evil. As if it is a sickness that is placed upon a person who lives this way. Who does not possess his possessions, but is possessed by them. He eats in darkness and his days are filled with sorrow, sickness, and anger.

It is ultimately a question that takes us to the 9th and 10th commandments also. "Thou shalt not covet." When we covet we are really saying to God, it is not enough. And it could be concerns over how we use our time, how we plan for our children's future, how we dedicate our prayers and efforts. When we become more concerned about how well our child is dressed, or how big a TV we can buy, or how our yard compares to the neighbor's. How much is enough?

For our sinful flesh, it is never enough. And that is why Jesus says, it is more difficult for a camel to go through the eye of a needle, than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God. And with the disciples we wonder, "well, then surely, no man can be saved, for in one way or another we have all held on, worried about, coveted earthly things."

But God does the impossible. With man, no way. But not with God. With God all things are possible. So he does the impossible. He blows the sand off that tomb, he takes those bones which have been pillaged and scattered about. And he brings them together, he puts flesh on them, and he says, "you shall call his name Jesus, for he will save the people from their sins."

Jesus, God's own Son, gives up all the treasures of the world in order to save you. He is met by the devil in the wilderness, who makes him an offer he can't refuse: he offers to give him all the kingdoms of the world, if he will just bow down to him. And Jesus responds: "It is written, you shall worship the Lord your God, and Him only shall you serve." Jesus does the impossible. He is the king who gives up everything in order

to bring us the gift of God. He is plundered, raided by the haunts of hell, to accept the punishment for our greed, our worries, our discontentment and coveting, and leave life behind to enter into our tomb.

But God does the impossible. He takes those bones, that dead heart, that lifeless flesh, and brings it to life. He pours down His riches on Jesus, and on the whole world: the gift of His grace; a full and free righteousness which is ours by faith. And Jesus then becomes the only reason why we receive anything that is good from God.

So the king looks back to see what is good. He looks back and sees all that has happened in his life; and he sees what is good. But it is not his life he sees. Rather he sees a family. A hard working family. He sees a family which sits down to dinner: a modest dinner, nothing fancy. And he thinks to himself, "To eat and drink – this is the gift of God."

He sees a hard working father, who goes to work not to earn something for himself, but to receive the gift of God. To share his calling with the world and to enjoy the good of all his labor under the sun. To take one day, and one moment, and give thanks for having a job. This is the gift of God.

And he sees a family gathered together after supper. Maybe they don't have cable. Maybe there is no TV at all. Maybe there are no mobile devices, no laptops or cell phones. But with him, we see something that is truly good. For they have received their portion, and rejoice in their labor. This is the gift of God.

And he sees how busy they are. But I'm not talking about bus rides and soccer practice and homework. I'm not talking about working two jobs and fighting traffic and fast food. I'm talking about keeping yourself busy with something that will last. For when Christ returns to put your bones back together. To raise you up a new creation. What will remain? Not the busyness of your days, not your sports or educational achievements, not your awards in the work place – but rather what will remain is your heart.

So open up your catechism when you get home. Or if you don't have one. Ask me, and I'll give you one. Open it up to the fourth petition. And think about this while you are riding the bus, or going to soccer practice or doing homework; while you are pulling through the drive-thru on your way to the second job – keep your heart as busy as the rest of you. In prayer. In thanksgiving. In staying busy with the joys of your heart. Open your hand, let the sand blow away, and let God lay hold of your heart. For that is something that will really last.