

#38 15-16

Psalm 49:1-12

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

Colossians 3:1-11

\*Luke 12:13-21

## What Are We Living For?

Please stand

Someone in the crowd said to him, "Teacher, tell my brother to divide the family inheritance with me." But he said to him, "Friend, who set me to be a judge or arbitrator over you?" And he said to them, "Take care! Be on your guard against all kinds of greed; for one's life does not consist in the abundance of possessions." Then he told them a parable: "The land of a rich man produced abundantly. And he thought to himself, 'What should I do, for I have no place to store my crops?' Then he said, 'I will do this: I will pull down my barns and build larger ones, and there I will store all my grain and my goods. And I will say to my soul, 'Soul, you have ample goods laid up for many years; relax, eat, drink, be merry.' But God said to him, 'You fool! This very night your life is being demanded of you. And the things you have prepared, whose will they be?' So it is with those who store up treasures for themselves but are not rich toward God."

This is the word of our Lord . . .

Today's scriptures just seem so full of humanity to me! How many of us can read anything from Ecclesiastes without being so conflicted! On the one hand, it seems so depressing - on the other hand we can so relate to the human thoughts. We as humans invest so much in what we do - what we think, how we strive - and discover regardless - we are constantly discovering it isn't enough - and sometimes it feels like we've just been chasing rainbows. The word the Preacher used is "vanity". It's all vanity.

The root of the word Vanity comes from Middle English: which got it from an Old French word *vanite*, from Latin *vanitas*, from *vanus* - meaning 'empty'. It is the quality of being worthless or futile, and the example they state in the Webster online dictionary is: "the vanity of human wishes".

How fascinating - wishes being vanity - being empty ~ and it is true. When we wish - we engage in magical thinking. The wish itself is empty. It is simply a thought - or feeling. Even if our wishes were for something profound - they are still just air. It is the being of our souls that is the only thing that is truly real - who we are right now in this moment is the only thing that is real. What we wish for is fantasy. And often times, we humans spend a lot of time in wishes, rather than being happy and content with who we are and what we have right now.

In Colossians, we are told to, "seek the things that are above . . . Set your minds on things that are above . . . not on things that are on earth, for you have died, and *your life is hidden* with Christ in God." WOW! Talk about mystery! Your life is hidden! How exciting! A treasure of the greatest value - our whole lives - is hidden - and our goal in life ~ is to discover our own lives! And we need to know - that just as Christ is a vast source of life - the truth is - so are our lives! Because our lives are intertwined in Jesus! And through him, we have another level of self that is intertwined with all of creation - all of the wisdom and love and power that is ever possible - our lives are also hidden in God - so our lives are mysteries that can grow on into forever! And so often we bemoan our lives, because we begin to think that all that we know *now* of ourselves - as a result of the past - which is dead and no longer real - and mixed in with our wishes of what our lives could be - those two things make us think that we are merely our past and emptiness - vanities.

It is vanity to think that what has happened to us in the past defines us. It is vanity to think that we deserve our wishes. It is vanity to live our lives chasing magical thinking.

So, what are we living for? Ourselves? God? Our families?

We are all part of God - connected to God - so whatever we think we are living for - we are living a lie - living in vanity - unless we come to realize that the purpose of human life is to care for each other and strive to create God's Paradise on earth - a return to where we came.

In our Gospel reading, people were coming to Jesus and asking him to determine for those around, whose vane desires of life had more authority than the other. It was as though that, because of his wisdom about God people

thought he should be a judge over earthly things. And Jesus was trying to separate the earthly from the heavenly. He is hoping to create caring people who live their lives with meaning, not emptiness, striving to know and better become one with the pure love of God.

If we can do that, we are not concerned with things anymore - we are more concerned with justice and caring for others who need encouragement - and admit it - we all need encouragement from each other - not judgment. Faith is not about judging, it is about being with each other in love.

Ecclesiastes is saying even wisdom is overrated, because we seek wisdom to fill our ego based human sense of self - and we could be striving to lose ourselves in God, not trying to know as much as God does, but to be as much a part of God as possible. All these things that we do on earth to have some sense of accomplishment and worth - is all just vanity - the striving to please our wounded egos. The world is full of vanities!

And Jesus is the connection to something so far removed from vanity - he is the purest form of caring for the self - he is about caring for each other - even those others who appear to be pure vanity. We cannot so easily be Christians without facing our own vanity, and submitting ourselves to the bullies and the greedy. This is such a challenge - how can we show God's best form of sacrificial love to those who are so egotistical? Or perhaps even more challenging, how do we love those who are very angry?

From my perspective, the world needs to pay attention to the angry people. Care enough about angry people. It is hard to do. We ignore and avoid angry people. They are difficult to be around. We take risks being around angry people. We could get hurt. But it seems to be the angry people who do harm. And angry people with weapons are truly dangerous. Guns do kill more people faster than other forms of murder. Can we catch the angry person before they get angry? Maybe while they are "just" hurt and scared? And make them feel less alone, teach them they can trust humanity - and then we begin to represent humanity to those feeling lost and alone and scared and lashing out.

Wouldn't it be great if churches could be a place of grace and support to people who are pre-angry, or presently angry ~ finding a way of creating peaceful, trusting humans in a terrifying world? But angry people aren't wanted in churches. Only sad or smiling people are really welcome in a church. Angry people make our defensive/protective mechanisms act up. We are afraid of them. Which makes them more alone and feel more angry, which in itself feels powerful.

What I cannot get my brain around is how people who claim to follow the Prince of love, compassion, Grace, Peace, can justify themselves being angry and being prepared to perform acts of violence on others. The example we have of Christ is loving enemies (and who is more our enemy than violent people?), forgiving, giving our things to those in need . . .

We all need to pay attention to the angry and afraid people. We need to be courageous and not turn away from them. We need to send out the message that holding on to anger long term is not OK, even though it feels so just at times (on both sides of the argument ). Short, temporary bursts of anger are healthy (in my opinion) even if they are still dangerous. But so many of the people who murdered others had been described as being violent angry people for a long time - wife abusers, and even the families seem to want to separate themselves from them.

O Christ! Teach us how to love and include angry people and turning them around into loving souls seeking your trust and companionship! And Jesus . . . help us all to trust that those in power will also learn to have integrity and compassion for all your children. And Holy Spirit, help us to see when they are us, and help us to live for knowing and being one with you! Amen!