

Eleventh Sunday after Pentecost – Proper 13

Text: Ecclesiastes 1:2,12-14; 2:18-26

Theme: How to Bring Meaning to our Earthly Possessions

When my wife and I married, we celebrated our honeymoon in the Pyrennee mountains above the French Riviera. Her dad's boss let us use his vacation home. It was beautiful. When you opened the 3 sets of double doors, you had a beautiful view of the valley below. The couple who owned that home seemed to have everything. But then their health began to fail. They weren't able to travel to their vacation home anymore, and it had to be sold. The wife died a short time later. Eventually, all of their possessions were sold or given away, and the husband ended up in a nursing home far away from his friends until he also died. It sounds depressing. To be honest, it is.

Solomon calls the joys of this world the "Vanity of vanities" in our text. The Hebrew word actually means "breath." So many of the pleasures of this world are like a breath. They last only for a moment. The joys that they give are meaningless because they are so short lived.

But there is hope. Today I would like to look at how we can bring meaning to our earthly possessions.

I. There is a wrong attitude with regard to these possessions.

That is to search for happiness through them. Paul writes in 1 Timothy 6:9, "*People who want to get rich fall into temptation and a trap and into many foolish and harmful desires that plunge men into ruin and destruction. For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil. Some people, eager for money, have wandered from the faith and pierced themselves with many griefs.*" It is tempting to want to get rich, so that we will have things, which we think will make us happy. We think that we've got to have the latest phone. Sometimes people have stood in line for hours when a new gaming system comes out. Think about the shoppers on black Friday who don't even go to bed to get the best bargains. How many of us told our parents when we were younger, "If you just get this for me, I will never ask for anything again?"

When we get older, the things that we pursue get more expensive. We think that just the right car or the perfect home of our dreams will bring happiness. We look to our savings, investments, and retirement accounts to bring up security in the future. There are times when we give up one job for another just because of better pay.

But the problem is that none of these things can bring happiness. There are all kinds of examples of this in the Bible. Greed often brings strife. In today's Gospel lesson an inheritance started a family fight. How many of us have had big family fights over an inheritance? Jesus says that our treasures should not be where thieves break in and steal or moths and rust destroy. Exactly those things happen with our worldly treasures. Sometimes they are stolen. Other times they wear out or break. They also eventually disappoint us. That cool phone that you have today will seem like a flip phone in a few months. In a couple of months you might wonder what you were thinking when you bought that outfit that you just had to have.

Our text brings out to two problems with seeking happiness in the things of this world. The first is that we become a slave to them. Verse 23 says, *“For all his days are full of sorrow, and his work is a vexation. Even in the night his heart does not rest.”* When we work to get things, our work becomes a burden. We might hate our job. The only reason why we work is because it gives us the things that we want. Those things that we wanted also become a burden. We spend years paying off things that we shouldn’t have bought in the first place. Rather than finding joy in such things and the work that we do, we become slaves to the things that we thought would bring us joy.

One day we will leave this world and those things will all go to someone else. Verse 18 says, *“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.”* We brought nothing into this world, and we can take nothing out of it. Sooner or later, everything that we own will belong to someone else. Solomon wonders whether that person will be wise with those things or a fool. (His son Rehoboam was a fool, and destroyed the kingdom that Solomon spent his life building.) We all know people who scrimped and saved all their lives to give their children an inheritance, and their kids blew it all in silly things.

When it comes to the wrong attitude toward our earthly possessions, today’s epistle lesson sums it up when it says that greed is idolatry.

II. However there is a proper attitude toward our earthly possessions.

The first is to find enjoyment in our work. Verse 24 says, *“There is nothing better for a person than that he should eat and drink and find enjoyment in his toil.”* Contrary to popular opinion, work is not a bad thing. Adam had work to do in the garden of Eden. The Bible says, “Whatever you do, do it for the glory of God.” When we look at our work as a way to serve God and our neighbor along with being a way that God enables us to earn a living, our work becomes a blessing. We look for good things that we can accomplish for others through our work. We want to glorify God in whatever we do.

We also see God’s hand active in our lives. Verse 24 goes on to say, *“This also, I saw, is from the hand of God, for apart from Him who can eat or drink or have enjoyment.”* That verse says that there is no enjoyment apart from God. We realize that all that we have in this life is a gift of God. We feel blessed with all of the things that He have given to us. He has blessed us with our spouse, children, and grandchildren. He blesses us with friends. He has given our nation countless blessings. We don’t see the our blessings as something that we have earned, but as precious gifts from the mercy and grace of God. All of the joys that we have in this world from a sunset to a comfortable recliner are gifts that He has given to us.

But we also recognize that the greatest gift of all is our salvation through Christ. That is the only thing that will remain forever. All of our treasures in this world, and even our health will someday fail, but God’s love for us in Christ will never fail. Christ has paid for all of our sins on the cross. He has made us God’s children through the washing of holy Baptism. He promises us the gift of everlasting life in heaven.

At our music event last week we heard the song, “Worth It All.” That song describes well how the greatest treasure we have is our salvation in Christ. The chorus goes:

I let go of all I have just to have all of You
And no matter what the cost I will follow You
Jesus everything I've lost I have found in You
When I finally reach the end I'll say
You are worth it all
You are worth it all

Jesus is the greatest treasure that we have. On the day when he calls us from this life, we won't care about any of that stuff that we leave behind. We will see our Savior, and our desire will be to live in His glorious presence.

The way that we can bring meaning to our earthly possessions is by seeing, that they are not our source of joy, but as something that is fleeting. We see God as the source of joy, who has given them to us by His grace, but we also know that the greatest joy is knowing that we belong to God both now and forever. May God give us that true joy in Him and His salvation for us.

Amen.

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