

The Lessons Appointed for Use on the

Sunday closest to August 3

Proper 13

Year C

RCL



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

Psalms 49:1-11

Luke 12:13-21

The Collect

Let your continual mercy, O Lord, cleanse and defend your Church; and, because it cannot continue in safety without your help, protect and govern it always by your goodness; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

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

Vanity of vanities, says the Teacher, vanity of vanities! All is vanity.

I, the Teacher, when king over Israel in Jerusalem, applied my mind to seek and to search out by wisdom all that is done under heaven; it is an unhappy business that God has given to human beings to be busy with. I saw all the deeds that are done under the sun; and see, all is vanity and a chasing after wind.

I hated all my toil in which I had toiled under the sun, seeing that I must leave it to those who come after me – and who knows whether they will be wise or foolish? Yet they will be master of all for which I toiled and used my wisdom under the sun. This also is vanity. So I turned and gave my heart up to despair concerning all the toil of my labors under the sun, because sometimes one who has toiled with wisdom and knowledge and skill must leave all to be enjoyed by another who did not toil for it. This also is vanity and a great evil. What do mortals get from all the toil and strain with which they toil under the sun? For all their days are full of pain, and their work is a vexation; even at night their minds do not rest. This also is vanity.

Psalm 49:1-11 Page 652, BCP

Audite haec, omnes

- 1 Hear this, all you peoples;
 hearken, all you who dwell in the world,
 you of high degree and low, rich and poor together.
- 2 My mouth shall speak of wisdom,
 and my heart shall meditate on understanding.
- 3 I will incline my ear to a proverb
 and set forth my riddle upon the harp.
- 4 Why should I be afraid in evil days,
 when the wickedness of those at my heels surrounds me,
- 5 The wickedness of those who put their trust in their goods,
 and boast of their great riches?
- 6 We can never ransom ourselves,
 or deliver to God the price of our life;
- 7 For the ransom of our life is so great,
 that we should never have enough to pay it,
- 8 In order to live for ever and ever,
 and never see the grave.
- 9 For we see that the wise die also;
 like the dull and stupid they perish
 and leave their wealth to those who come after them.
- 10 Their graves shall be their homes for ever,
 their dwelling places from generation to generation,
 though they call the lands after their own names.
- 11 Even though honored, they cannot live for ever;
 they are like the beasts that perish.

Luke 12:13-21

Someone in the crowd said to Jesus, “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.”

SERMON

Stuff. BOY! Do we love stuff. I was at Lowe's the other day and saw a display of wifi enabled thermostats. With this \$250 piece of stuff, you can change the temperature in your house with your smart phone from anyplace in the world. I asked Ryan why anyone would want to do such a thing, and he told me, "You put in a webcam so you can see if anyone breaks into your house while you are gone, then run the thermostat up and make it extremely uncomfortable for the burglar while he's there."

I guess...

You can now buy window blinds that go up and down by remote because if there was ever anything we need, it's more remotes and anyway who has time to get up and let the blinds down? We're too busy finding all the other remote controls we lost.

I honestly don't understand my own hunger for gadgets that defeat me. I have been forced to admit that my smart phone is smarter than I am. Worse than that, as time passes phones get smarter while I get dumber. I am not going to win this race. And yet...all of us run this race as if it matters, as if we truly believe the bumper sticker that says, "He who dies with the most toys wins."

When does it start? We went to Panera for lunch after church last week. Vivi realized that no one was doing anything to entertain her and set up a protest, so I was delegated to walk her in the mall. We went across the hall to the purse and cheap jewelry place. Vivi looked with interest at the stuffed animals, but when we got to the display of costume jewelry, she nearly jumped from my arms! It apparently starts early, this craving for sparkly things.

"Vanity of vanities", says the Teacher, "vanity of vanities! All is vanity."

"But they are such ATTRACTIVE vanities", replies the student.

Well...yes, they are, but could there be something else going on? We had an interesting exercise this year at the Lay Minister's School. The issue was living simply, and we were to break into small groups and propose ways in which we could simplify our lives.

The first to speak said he had two cars, and that he could simplify his life by selling one.

“That won’t work”, the group pointed out. “Either you or your wife will be stranded that way. Working out who has the car which day will add complexity to your life, not lead to simplicity.”

The group was exactly right. Complexity is forced on us by the world in which we live. We live in a place and time when an automobile is, for the overwhelming majority of people, a necessity, not a luxury. We’re suspended in a place and time in which the assumption is that each of us are independently mobile. We have zoned commercial establishments away from neighborhoods so that if you need a quart of milk, you’re going to have to have wheels, then we underfunded effective public transportation so that the wheels need to be attached to your own car. Mahatma Gandhi tried always to live simply, wearing a simple robe which he wove himself. He once said that his friends complained that it cost an enormous amount of money to allow him to live simply. I don’t doubt it. We’re all stuck like raisins in a loaf of raisin bread, creatures of a place and time which imposes complexity upon us. It takes enormous effort to live otherwise. Not convinced? Go home and tell your wife or husband that you are selling all the cars and buying bicycles for everyone in the family. See how simple your life becomes then. We work ourselves into an early grave trying to earn enough money to buy AAA batteries to run the remote control so that we can raise and lower the blinds.

Last year, Kathy and I had a discussion about Christmas gifts. Here’s what we decided: we don’t need them. (Except for the fruitcake from Tom. We need that.) We are fortunate enough to have the resources to buy what we need through the year. We don’t need to spend money on something we think the other would enjoy. Much better to ask directly, then do it together. Then we had the same discussion with our close friends who buy us stuff at Christmas. It was a first step toward simplicity, but only a baby step. Admitting that we have let the pursuit of stuff dominate our lives is one thing. Trying to live in a place and a time besotted with the pursuit of stuff without buying into it is an-

other. You could go live in the woods in a 12X12 cabin “off the grid”, but doing so will separate you from the rest of society. You will be a hermit, like it or not. I don’t understand the Gospel to call us to be hermits. At the end of the day, we are called to somehow live within the world without being a part of the world. That may sound familiar. The New Testament mentions it rather a lot.

Do not love the world or the things in the world. The love of the Father is not in those who love the world — 1 John 2:15

Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your minds, so that you may discern what is the will of God—what is good and acceptable and perfect. — Letter to the Romans 12:2

If you belonged to the world, the world would love you as its own. Because you do not belong to the world, but I have chosen you out of the world—therefore the world hates you. — Gospel of John 15:19

The problem then was the same as the problem now. God is willing to lift you to heaven. God is not willing to haul your stuff up, too. The tighter you hold on to your stuff, the more difficult it will be to get that camel through the eye of a needle, to mix a metaphor. We have a real problem with values. Happily, things can change. Sooner or later, like the child who gets his fill in the candy shop, our stomachs turn. Solomon, who is credited with writing Ecclesiastes, eventually realizes that valuing the things of this world leads only to worry, anxiety and nausea.

I hated all my toil in which I had toiled under the sun, seeing that I must leave it to those who come after me – and who knows whether they will be wise or foolish? Yet they will be master of all for which I toiled and used my wisdom under the sun. This also is vanity. So I turned and gave my heart up to despair concerning all the toil of my labors under the sun, because sometimes one who has toiled with wisdom and knowledge and skill must leave all to be enjoyed by another who did not toil for it. This also is vanity and a great evil. What do mortals get from all the toil and strain with which they toil under the sun? For all their days are full of pain, and their work is a vexation; even at night their minds do not rest. This also is vanity.

Whew! That’s pretty depressing all right. “I hated all my toil seeing that I must

leave it to those who come after me — and who knows whether they will be wise or foolish?” My friend Charlie would sagely say, “By that time I will have lost interest” and he’s exactly right about that. Spot on, Charlie! Solomon has worried himself into a misery hole by valuing things that are of no value and by failing to value that which is. It doesn’t matter whether or not the ones who inherit your collection of remote controls and AAA batteries are wise or foolish. What matters is what you managed to do with the resources you were granted while you were here. Did you pursue compassion? Did you love the lord your God with all your heart and all your strength and all your mind? Did you love your neighbor as yourself? We live in a time of high unemployment and a shockingly hurtful minimum wage. Did you respond to the human suffering presented to you with compassion or did you try to make a villain of the victim and say hurtful things like “Get a job!”? Just what did you do with the grain you had stored in your barns? And how much good, ultimately, do you think all that grain will do you if your life is demanded of you tonight?

The teachings of Jesus and the good news of His life and death are vital for authentic living because they are transformative. Contemplating the life of Jesus will upturn your ideas of value and worth. Once there was a very wealthy man who was also very righteous. He was a great philanthropist, giving generously to alleviate suffering. He was also addicted to his wealth. He prayed, “Lord God, when it comes my time, please let me take my wealth with me, for I could not enjoy heaven without it.”

In light of his many acts of kindness, the Throne of Grace granted him a special permit. “Take you wealth, convert it to gold bars, and keep it with you always.”

And so he did, dragging a heavy bag stuffed with gold bars with him wherever he went. Eventually, his life was demanded of him. Saint Peter met him at the gates and protested that he couldn’t bring his bag in with him.

“I have special permission!” he protested. After a consultation on the golden telephone, Saint Peter agreed that he could bring it in. “But”, Saint Peter said, “I must know

what was so important to you that you would bring it with you to heaven.”

He looked inside at the rows of gold bars, then back to the man incredulously. “Paving stones?!? You brought paving stones?”

“Remember that when you leave this earth, you can take with you nothing that you have received – only what you have given.”¹

AMEN

BENEDICTION

Remember that when you leave this earth, you can take with you nothing that you have received – only what you have given. Saint Thomas Aquinas reminded us, “The bread which you withhold belongs to the hungry; the clothing you shut away, to the naked; and the money you bury in the earth is the redemption and freedom of the penniless.” Though your barns are full, if your heart is empty, numb, and dismissive you have had your reward, and you will leave it behind.

¹ St. Francis of Assisi

Optional parts of the readings are set off in square brackets.

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