

The Eleventh Sunday after Pentecost
August 8, 2010
Amazing Grace Lutheran Church - Pastor Chip Wilke

Ecclesiastes 1:2; 2:18-26

"Meaningless! Meaningless!" says the Teacher. "Utterly meaningless! Everything is meaningless."... I hated all the things I had toiled for under the sun, because I must leave them to the one who comes after me. And who knows whether he will be a wise man or a fool? Yet he will have control over all the work into which I have poured my effort and skill under the sun. This too is meaningless. So my heart began to despair over all my toilsome labor under the sun. For a man may do his work with wisdom, knowledge and skill, and then he must leave all he owns to someone who has not worked for it. This too is meaningless and a great misfortune. What does a man get for all the toil and anxious striving with which he labors under the sun? All his days his work is pain and grief; even at night his mind does not rest. This too is meaningless. A man can do nothing better than to eat and drink and find satisfaction in his work. This too, I see, is from the hand of God, for without him, who can eat or find enjoyment? To the man who pleases him, God gives wisdom, knowledge and happiness, but to the sinner he gives the task of gathering and storing up wealth to hand it over to the one who pleases God. This too is meaningless, a chasing after the wind. (NIV)

Have you ever thought about what life would be like if there were no God? For starters you would not be here this morning. Thankfully, you are here because you know the one true God and Savior. But how would life change if we had no God? What would be the goal of our life? What would we set our hearts on and where would we place all of our focus? Chasing after earthly things, going after all our hearts desire, would most likely be our aim, wouldn't it? To try and satisfy our lusts, gain the most wealth, achieve any kind of fame and glory for ourselves and our families while we have the time. The devil likes to tell us that is the life - to serve ourselves - to live life up - to just do it - to eat, drink, and be merry for tomorrow we will surely die.

While all that might seem good and tempting, as a wise man points out to us this morning that is a life of little value. For both the famous and the unknown, the rich and the poor, the wise and the foolish, will all die. Our lives all go by in a flash. As Moses writes: *"The length of our days is seventy years-- or eighty, if we have the strength; yet their span is but trouble and sorrow, for they quickly pass, and we fly away"* (Psalm 90) I pray our eyes are opened to see just how pointless, how void of meaning, how empty, our lives would really be without God. Even more I pray we recognize & rejoice in this truth today: **God has Rescued Us from a Meaningless Life.**

Ecclesiastes is a book most likely written by Solomon in his later years of life. He also wrote Proverbs and Song of Songs. You might recall that Solomon, King of Israel, was the son of David. He was the one God granted wisdom unlike any other person before or any after him. He reigned in Israel's glory years and Solomon did everything his heart desired. But he also had a point in life where he was led astray and began to follow other gods in idol worship. The Lord called Solomon to repentance and said to him: *"Since this is your attitude and you have not kept my covenant and my decrees, which I commanded you, I will most certainly tear the kingdom away from*

you and give it to one of your subordinates. Nevertheless, for the sake of David your father, I will not do it during your lifetime. I will tear it out of the hand of your son” (1 Kings 11).

Solomon, with his background and experience, gives us a unique perspective in this book. He writes about what life is like from a human perspective and human effort, a life he refers to as **“life under the sun.”** In short, he refers to a life without the one true God. That life stands in stark contrast to a life with God. Solomon, **“the Teacher,”** begins: **“Meaningless! Meaningless!”... “Utterly meaningless! Everything is meaningless.”** Since this is the major theme of this book it might be good to spend a moment on it. The KJV translates a bit more literally **“vanity of vanities.”** The Hebrew word is one that means **“breath”** or **“vapor.”** Solomon is emphasizing that nothing will last here in this life under the sun.. Everything that humans are and everything humans do has a fleeting nature to it. Everything like breath or a vapor is here for an instant & then gone just like that.

So Solomon says: **“I hated all the things I had toiled for under the sun, because I must leave them to the one who comes after me. And who knows whether he will be a wise man or a fool? Yet he will have control over all the work into which I have poured my effort and skill under the sun. This too is meaningless. So my heart began to despair over all my toilsome labor under the sun. For a man may do his work with wisdom, knowledge and skill, and then he must leave all he owns to someone who has not worked for it. This too is meaningless and a great misfortune.”**

Do you hear loud and clear what Solomon is saying? All the things we work for and all the earthly things we build up for ourselves will one day be handed down to another. That person might use the things we worked for wisely or they might waste everything we did by their laziness or recklessness. The point is someone else will have control over all the things you worked so hard for, all those things for which you poured out your effort and skill. They could easily bring it all to ruin. That is kind of sad, isn't it? That is a misfortune. If working to accumulate things is what gives our lives meaning then recognizing this truth would lead someone like Solomon to despair over all his toilsome labor. Perhaps he was thinking of handing his kingdom over to a son who would not use wise judgement. We could easily find examples in corporate America of companies passed down and brought to ruin by the next generation.

So Solomon asks the question: **“What does a man get for all the toil and anxious striving with which he labors under the sun?”** What Solomon observes again from merely a human perspective is not something very rewarding. **“All his days his work is pain and grief; even at night his mind does not rest. This too is meaningless.”** What you get for all your hard work and effort is one big headache after another. You get tired. You get sick. You get hurt. You get worn down and worn out. You have sleepless nights, stress, anxiety and sorrow. So in summary what is life like under the sun? What is life like without God? You get to toil all your life through pain and misery and hard work to gain a whole bunch of things that are only temporary. Then you die and someone else gets them all. Sound good to anyone? No wonder Solomon concludes: **“Utterly meaningless! Everything is meaningless.”**

Yet, how often don't we foolishly chase after the wind, dear friends? We far too often set our hearts and minds on earthly things and run after things that are only temporary while closing our eyes to things that are eternal. We think if only we had

more money, were more popular, had a better job or bigger house, if only we had more this or more that, then we would find happiness. But the truth is obtaining all the things in the world does not give us a life filled with purpose. That is just foolish, self-centered thinking that will lead us down a road where one day we would have to admit, like Solomon, everything is meaningless. That is a life under the sun, a life without God. If such a life is filled with pain and misery now, think about how horrible it would be to have an eternity separated from God.

Thanks and praise and honor and glory be to our God who has rescued us from a meaningless life. Solomon, beginning in these last verses, starts to gradual point to the only place true happiness and meaning for life can be found. ***“A man can do nothing better than to eat and drink and find satisfaction in his work. This too, I see, is from the hand of God, for without him, who can eat or find enjoyment? To the man who pleases him, God gives wisdom, knowledge and happiness, but to the sinner he gives the task of gathering and storing up wealth to hand it over to the one who pleases God. This too is meaningless, a chasing after the wind.”***

Did you catch the good news? There is more for us than a life time of suffering through hard labor only to die. There is a God. He is the only one who can bring us true joy and satisfaction. God can even make our work enjoyable. Every blessing we have comes from His powerful hand. Open this book we call the Bible and we find this is just the beginning of the good news. God does so much more for us than allow us to enjoy our food and work and lives here on earth. God’s love for us stretches far beyond the gift of being able to find joy and satisfaction from our effort.

God’s love reached down to rescue us from a meaningless life when His only Son became poor so that we, through His poverty, might become rich. Jesus left the glories of heaven to come to earth for you and me. God became man and lived among us and lived for us. Jesus kept every command of God perfectly. Jesus never once sinned by setting His heart and mind on earthly things. Then for our sins of constantly chasing after the things of this world rather than having in mind the things of God, Jesus suffered and Jesus died. For those sins and our every other sin Jesus gave up His life on the cross. Now you and I have been rescued from a meaningless life. Our life is now filled with purpose. We live for Him who died for us and was raised again. Because Jesus rose from the dead we can be confident that our labor in the Lord is never in vain.

Do you see the huge difference between those who live under the sun, a life without God, and those who live by faith? What a difference it makes to know our sins have been washed away by the blood of Jesus! We have a God who watches over us and takes care of us. We have a God who works all things out for His children. We have a God who blesses His own. Because of Jesus we do not have to fret about what we will leave behind or who will be in charge of it because we will pass from this life into unimaginable riches and enjoyment. As Paul writes: ***“I consider that our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us” (Romans 8)***. God has given us a life, in Christ, where we will now live and reign eternally.

So I pray we listen today to the wisdom of Solomon when he talks about how everything here without God is fleeting and meaningless. Remember these words words aren’t coming from a man who had a down and out existence. Solomon humanly speaking had it all - all the wealth, all the women, and the power and fame and land and glory one could ever ask for - and then some. Yet, this wise old man realized that having

all of those things in a life under the sun, a life without God was really nothing - meaningless, meaningless! So set your hearts on things above dear friends for that is where your life is now and will be forever. Every day thank God for rescuing us from a meaningless life. Amen.