

*St. John Lutheran Church*

*The Sermon*

*Rev. Andy Rutrough*

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July 31, 2022

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

Luke 12:13-21

“Vanity of vanities, all is vanity,’ says the Teacher.” “This is vanity and a striving after wind.” The Hebrew word for vanity here is vapor, smoke, wisps of nothing. “It is an unhappy business that the Lord God has given us to be busy with, all the days of our lives.”

Woah there, wait a minute. I thought our business was a good thing. I thought work was important. Doesn’t it say in Genesis, that when God made the human being, God gave it the gift of work. God put the Adam in the garden to tend and keep.

Granted, we have done a truly horrible job of tending and keeping the garden in which God has put us to work. But that’s still our work. Now Ecclesiastes is saying that our work is vapor and a striving after wind.

In our culture, work gives you value and purpose. Very often if people don’t have some work, they are regarded as worthless. Whereas if somebody has work, especially paid work, then they are a whole person, an adult in good standing. And if we make a lot of money from our work, we are regarded as even more important.

Have you ever heard the question, “What is he worth?” A person’s net worth is supposed to be calculated by subtracting how much he or she owes from the dollar value of what she or he has. That’s your net worth. Is that not totally crazy? Here we are talking about a person who has been made in the image of God, as if their worth their value could be assessed with a price tag, a dollar amount? Is there not something wrong with this picture?

“‘Vanity of vanities,’ says the preacher, ‘all is vanity’” vapor, smoke.

God, what a relief.

It’s a relief because now, our value, our purpose, our dignity does not depend on our work. It is a gift from God, given to us at the dawn of time, and restored to us again and again by the cross of Jesus Christ. God gives us work, God gives us money as tools, means by which we honor the image of God in us and others, the presence of God in creation. The work and the money, without the image of God and without the presence of God, are vapor. With God, we have value and dignity already.

In the Gospel lesson for today, Jesus tells a story about a rich man. This rich man has enough land to produce more grain than he needs to eat. In fact, he has so much land that he puts his grain into barns. One year, he gets a really abundant harvest. In today’s terms, his stock portfolio has gone way up. He has invested in or built up a small business to massive proportions. He says to himself, “I will tear down my barns and I will build bigger barns in which to store my grain. Then I will say to myself, “Self, relax, eat drink and be merry, because you have plenty.”

Sounds like a dream, right? But what a poor, pathetic fool he is. Yes, this man is wealthy. He may work hard, overseeing the fields and the tearing down and building up barns. But notice, he thinks of no one, no one but himself. He is fabulously wealthy, but he does not think of his family, he mentions no friends. He has no regard at all for his community. His workers who would have helped him plant and weed and harvest the crop, don’t even exist for him.

“Beware of all kinds of greed,” Jesus says. Greed isolates people. It lures us into thinking that money will keep us safe. Yes, God gives us money as a tool so that we can help each other have enough to eat, live in decent housing, go see a doctor, have fun, and so on. But money cannot keep us safe or give us purpose. Greed tears families apart. We have all heard of brothers and sisters falling out over money. Very wealthy people sometimes have deep difficulty figuring out who their real friends are, because so many people are just after their money. Greed cuts you off from your community. It causes people to use their employees and other people in their economic system as if they were cogs in a machine, as if they were robots, to be sucked dry of all the time and work and initiative you can legally get out of them, and then to be left empty like a husk of seed.

God gives us tools to keep us safe. God gives us friends and family. God gives us police departments and military personnel, to keep us safe. God give us a voice, and action to speak up when there are problems in our police departments and military institutions, and with our family and friends. God gives us voice and action to keep us safe because all of these things are composed of people, and people will fail.

God does not fail. God is present with us in the midst of family and friends, police and military, wealth and poverty, work and rest. Even though bad tings will happen to us, God will never leave us, and God will carry us through.

So relax. Yes, work. Yes, earn and save and invest and give and spend your money wisely. But don't worry too much about it. Trust God instead. Life is a lot more fun that way.