

July 31, 2016; the 18th Sunday in Ordinary Time

Old Testament Lesson; Ecclesiastes 1:2, 12-14&3: 18-23

Responsive Reading; Psalm 49

Epistle Lesson; Colossians 3: 1-11

Gospel Lesson; Luke 12: 13-21

Sermon Title; VANITY

By Rev. James A. Gardner

Vanity, it is not just the thing that appears in the mirror on your sun visor in your car.

In our message for today Vanity is striving for something to fulfill you that actually leaves you empty.

In our Good News Bible, Ecclesiastes uses the word useless while the New Revised and the King James use the word Vanity. I like the ring of Vanity.

Verse 2 reads “Vanity of vanities, says the Preacher, vanity of vanities! All is vanity.”

OK, hold that thought. I want to bounce around here a little bit to either make things a little clearer, or totally confuse you. Either one works for me.

There is a verse in Matthew 6, that says, “Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust consume and where thieves break in and steal, but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust consumes and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also.”

OK, yady, yady, yady. That sounds all right and righteous but let’s get real. I may not be “of” this world but I sure live here. As long as I live here I need stuff. I need food in my belly, clothes on my back and a roof over my head. Let’s just move on and not push this too hard.

If you feel this way, I hear you. I have reacted the same way.

This is where it is valuable to have a good understanding of the Old Testament as well as the New.

If you buy into the belief that Solomon was the wisest man on earth, and that every King or Queen that came to him for advice became rich and powerful, and they rewarded him with unbelievable gifts of gold, jewels and other finery making Solomon’s kingdom the richest in history, then you will find Ecclesiastes very interesting.

After Solomon had built up his kingdom so that it was so rich, and everything was coated in gold and silk and jewels, and silver was considered to be “junk” metal, he stopped to reflect

on his life and his happiness or lack thereof. He decided that his entire life was just so much garbage. I cleaned that up.

Solomon realized that if you burn yourself out to acquire stuff, and do not enjoy your life as you do it you have wasted your time and wisdom. He realized that everyone dies in the end and someone else gets his stuff without having had to work for it. That person might be wise or a fool but they get the stuff and pass it on or lose it but the one that worked for it has no say in the future. Israel was gutted and all the wealth plundered to the point that it reverted back to being a dusty desert. Even the great pyramids of Egypt have been gutted by grave robbers.

This is still going on today. Donald Trump and Bill Gates have amassed great fortunes but what good will it do them 100 years from now. Bill seems to have read Ecclesiastes because he is supposedly trying to disperse his fortune and not leave Billions to his kids. They will just get a couple Million and will have to work to turn it into Billions. Poor kids!

This is one of those weeks where the scriptures tie in together beautifully. The Psalmist echoes Ecclesiastes. Paul offers alternatives to happiness other than playing the power games of the world's value system, and Jesus gives a story that clearly makes the point that Solomon strives to express.

Money is not the root of all evil; the LOVE of money is the root of all evil. There is nothing wrong with being rich as long as you

enjoyed the trip and have no reason to feel guilty for hurting others along the way. There is nothing wrong with being “poor”. Wanda and I say that we are the richest people in the world, the only thing we do not have is money.

We have a brother-in-law that epitomizes this concept.

Rich Rada worked at Kodak and when he started he was getting laid off every time there was a slowdown. Sometimes it was months before they called him back. Every time he was laid off he got a temporary job and he always loved that job. One of his lay off jobs was cleaning floors and offices of a car dealership on the midnight shift. He always showed his enthusiasm about the job, commenting on how good the cleaning materials were and how well he was treated, even though he seldom ever saw anyone to treat him good or bad.

Another time when I ran a Sea-food store and had a booth at Darien Lake International Festival, Rich helped me out. I had my son’s coach there to teach us how to open live clams for sale. After working with Rich the coach told me, “If I was ever to start a business, any kind of business, I would want your brother-in-law as a partner.” Rich put that kind of joy and excitement into any job he took on.

Rich always threw away the vanity and incorporated joy into everything that he did and does. Rich does not have to wait to go to heaven: he is already there. Everywhere he is he is in the

company of God because God is love and Rich loves everything he does. It is good he was never in the military because he would have loved KP and ruined the Sgt's whole day.

In our Old Testament Lesson the very next verse after our reading stops is this:

“There is nothing better for a man than that he should eat and drink, and find enjoyment in his toil. This also, I saw, is from the hand of God; for apart from him who can eat or who can have enjoyment? For to the man who pleases him God gives wisdom and knowledge and joy; but to the sinner he gives the work of gathering and heaping, only to give to one who pleases God. This also is vanity and a striving after wind.”

So to sum up. To be rich all you need to do is love God, love your family, love your food, love your drink, love your work and you will already be in heaven.

Anything else is searching for God in all the wrong places and that my friends is vanity and chasing after the wind.

Hallelujah and Amen