*The Reverend Jennifer Deaton*

*St. Andrew’s Cathedral*

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*Ecclesiastes 1:2, 12-14 and 2:18-23; Psalm 49:1-11; Colossians 3:1-11; Luke 12:13-21*

We don’t know for certain who wrote Ecclesiastes, one of the wisdom books in Hebrew scriptures. For the most part it doesn’t read like poetry, like the book of Psalms. It’s not a story, like Job. It isn’t a collection of sayings, like Proverbs, or of ethical teachings, like Sirach. It doesn’t sing of God’s eternal Wisdom, the fashioner of all things, as the writer of the Wisdom of Solomon does. Ecclesiastes is more of an extended meditation on the meaning and mostly meaninglessness of life.

*Vanity of vanities,* says the writer, who is called a Teacher and who some have said is King Solomon, but it doesn’t sound like him. *Vanity of vanities, all is vanity*. The Hebrew word means breath or vapor, something that is insubstantial, transitory, futile. *I saw all the deeds that are done under the sun; and see, all is vanity and a chasing after wind*. It is almost impossible to read Ecclesiastes without sighing, so that to the end of every verse the writer might as well have added, “he said, gloomily.” It’s Eeyore, Winnie the Pooh’s melancholy friend, for whom everything was an unhappy business, it’s Eeyore whose voice I hear when I read this text. Once, when Eeyore lost his tail, Christopher Robin tacked it back on and said, “There now. Did I get your tail back on properly?” Eeyore answered, “No matter. Most likely lose it again anyway.” Vanity of vanities, all is vanity.

The truth is, we’ve all felt this way, when a task has been hard, when an outcome has been disappointing, when tragedy has struck, when success has proved fleeting. *It is an unhappy business that God has given human beings to be busy with*, says the writer of Ecclesiastes, gloomily, *for all their days are full of pain, and their work is a vexation; even at night their minds do not rest*. We work and we work and we work, and even if we accumulate and accumulate and accumulate, one day we will be gone and all that we worked for, all that we gathered up, all that we accumulated will be left behind, no longer ours to claim or control.

Just because we can’t control it, though, doesn’t mean we don’t try to. We just work harder, we accumulate more, we replace our sighing with stuff and savings that keep us from having to give our hearts up to despair. Our minds are, of necessity, we tell ourselves, set on things of earth where food and drink, clothing and shelter, education and healthcare and everything under the sun takes some work to produce and costs some money to have. Work has value – it uses our variety of God-given gifts, it invites creativity and innovation, it provides resources for community, and it earns us the ability to have what we need to live.

*The land of a rich man produced abundantly,* Jesus began, and for those who heard the parable then and for us today, it would have been clear that work had been done – perhaps by the man himself, but most likely with the help of others, and certainly by the grace of God who sent sunlight and rain, who gives growth to seeds and hearts and minds. The man, whose barns are already full, does with his windfall what most of us would do, on sound advice from our financial planners – he builds bigger barns, insulating himself from the anxiety we all feel that without that much grain set aside we just might starve, if not today then someday when there’s not such a good harvest.

That’s the someday we anticipate when our minds are set on things of earth, and it is prudent to plan for it. But nothing, no planning, whether we are rich or poor, wise or foolish, says the psalmist, nothing prepares us for the someday the writer of Ecclesiastes fears, the someday in Jesus’ parable. *You fool!* God says to the rich man. *This very night your life is being demanded of you. And the things you have prepared, whose will they be?*

The parable ends there. Jesus doesn’t tell us how the man responded, but only that anyone who measures life in this way, our minds set on earthly things, is a similar fool and will meet the same fate. Vanity of vanities. *Take care*, Jesus says, *for life does not consist in the abundance of possessions*. How then are we to live?

Back in the Hundred Acre Wood, on that day Eeyore lost his tail, Winnie the Pooh was worried about his friend. The story goes, “Pooh felt that he ought to say something helpful, but he didn’t know quite what. So he decided to do something helpful instead.” All is not vanity. For those who trust in God, who follow Jesus Christ, who have been baptized into his death and resurrection, for us, life is more than what we earn and what we have; it is what we have been given, and what we give. What we accumulate in our barns, our storage boxes, our bank accounts; what ends at death; those are earthly things. Life in Christ gives far more, and demands far more, and counts as its only currency, love.

The sin of the rich fool is not that he had more grain than he needed. It is that he did not need anything or anyone else, and that he did not consider how others might need him. *So it is with those who store up treasures for themselves*, Jesus says, *but are not rich toward God*. The fool thinks only of himself, speaks only to himself, is grateful only for himself, acts only on his own behalf. When his life is demanded of him, he will have nothing he has valued, nothing that gave his life meaning.

We don’t know what happened next. Perhaps the man turned and gave his heart up to despair. Perhaps he sighed, gloomily. Perhaps he put to death his foolishness and came alive, loving God with all his heart and soul and mind and strength, loving his neighbor as himself. In the words of leadership guru Simon Sinek, “We can try to build a happy life alone, but why would we? Together is better.” Indeed, in Christ, together is the only way to live, for love and mercy and forgiveness and generosity and inclusion and community only have value as gifts of God, and as our gifts to each other.

“A little consideration,” even unhappy Eeyore said, “A little consideration, a little thought for others, makes all the difference. Or so they say.”

Jesus calls us beyond our selves, beyond our barns, beyond our fears, beyond the edges of our own fields, bringing all that we have for Christ himself to bless and break and share. Life in Christ can’t be earned, but it does take work. It can’t be grasped, but it does require us to reach out our hands. It can’t be hoarded or even possessed, but oh, it is abundant! It transforms even our earthly things and makes them able to reveal the glory of God as we use them to meet the needs that are around us, where there is not enough grain, not enough food, not enough welcome, not enough safety, not enough happiness in life. Even death is no longer in vain, for our life in Christ only begins here, and continues where sorrow and sighing are no more but life everlasting.

Friends, let us not be fools but rather faithful. Our lives are demanded of us now, this day and every day, in every moment by Christ who is all and is in all. May we put to death in ourselves our greed, our vanity, our fear that we do not have enough, or cannot be enough, or cannot do enough, and come alive, together, to love, to show mercy, to forgive, to be generous. And all these things we will then have prepared in love – wonder of wonders, whose will they be? *Amen.*