

"Occupied with Joy"

Text: Ecclesiastes 5:10-20

"Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly, teaching and admonishing one another in all wisdom, singing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, with thankfulness in your hearts to God. ¹⁷ And whatever you do, in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him." (Colossians 3:16-17)
Amen.

Dear Fellow Christians:

There is a razor thin line between good-persistent and stupid-stubborn. My guess is you've all seen examples of each. My guess is also that most, if not all, have wondered at one time or another if you yourself have crossed over from the one to the other. Do-it-yourselfers are especially at risk here. When are we time and money ahead just hiring someone to do what is consuming far too much of our time and driving us nuts? When are we better off buying something already made as opposed to making it ourselves?

While that sort of stupid-stubborn can cause frustration, the problems increase dramatically when the stakes are raised. Early this summer, for example, a 46-year-old Chicago man was canoeing in a local lake with another man, a woman... and a cat. (You know this just isn't going to end well.) The cat, as cats are wont to do, made the inexplicable decision to jump out of the boat and into the lake. In a panic and unable to get the cat back into the canoe, the man, bound and determined to rescue said cat, decided to jump in after it. In the process he capsized the canoe. A nearby pontoon rescued the other man, the woman, and the cat. The man who jumped in drown.

As tragic and stupid as that sort of thing is, the stakes are ratcheted up even more when we stop to think just how frustrating it must be for God to see how stupid-stubborn his children are on such a regular basis. How pathetic we must look when we struggle for things that, if we ever did succeed in getting them, would probably do us more harm than good.

Keep that thought mind as you hear or read our text for this morning. Here our God offers us a reminder of just how important it is to analyze our lives from time to time – especially our goals, desires, and aspirations – and to reevaluate the direction our life is taking. Our text is found in Ecclesiastes 5, beginning with the 10th Verse:

^{ESV} **Ecclesiastes 5:10-20** *He who loves money will not be satisfied with money, nor he who loves wealth with his income; this also is vanity. ¹¹ ¶ When goods increase, they increase who eat them, and what advantage has their owner but to see them with his eyes? ¹² ¶ Sweet is*

the sleep of a laborer, whether he eats little or much, but the full stomach of the rich will not let him sleep. ¹³ ¶ There is a grievous evil that I have seen under the sun: riches were kept by their owner to his hurt, ¹⁴ and those riches were lost in a bad venture. And he is father of a son, but he has nothing in his hand. ¹⁵ As he came from his mother's womb he shall go again, naked as he came, and shall take nothing for his toil that he may carry away in his hand. ¹⁶ This also is a grievous evil: just as he came, so shall he go, and what gain is there to him who toils for the wind? ¹⁷ Moreover, all his days he eats in darkness in much vexation and sickness and anger. ¹⁸ ¶ Behold, what I have seen to be good and fitting is to eat and drink and find enjoyment in all the toil with which one toils under the sun the few days of his life that God has given him, for this is his lot. ¹⁹ Everyone also to whom God has given wealth and possessions and power to enjoy them, and to accept his lot and rejoice in his toil--this is the gift of God. ²⁰ For he will not much remember the days of his life because God keeps him occupied with joy in his heart.

So far the very words of our merciful God. Our God has preserved his Word down through the ages so that you and I could be saved. He has also given that Word to us so that we could learn to avoid the pain and suffering that we routinely and foolishly bring upon ourselves by our disobedience. We ask our God to again bless us this morning through our study of his truth as we pray: **"Sanctify us by Your truth, O Lord. Your Word is truth!"** Amen.

So much of the hurt that we suffer is self-imposed. So many of our wounds are self-inflicted. It's a wonder that our God doesn't just give up on us and abandon us to our own foolishness, our own sinful, selfish passions. Wouldn't it be great if someone would just take us aside and tell us – or remind us – just how it really is? Wouldn't it be just exactly what we need if someone who has "been there and done that," someone who could be *trusted*, could lay it all out for us and give it to us straight?

Someone has. In fact someone just did in the text we just read. His name is Solomon and in addition to a couple of Psalms and a love song, he left us with two Books of the Bible (Proverbs and Ecclesiastes) that combine to offer timeless, priceless guidance to every Christian of every age.

Solomon had seen it all and done it all. He started in such a great place as the heir to his father David's throne and as the recipient of the blessing and good favor of God himself. But then Solomon took all of that and, at least for a time, just plain threw it all away.

Wait, but didn't Solomon just continue to gain more and more throughout the course of his life? How is it that we can say that he threw

anything away? Because contentment, which is what he seemed to start out with, just can't share an apartment with raw, unbridled desire. The first is all about God; the second is all about you.

If you are familiar at all with Solomon and his life's story, you are probably already familiar with the summary of his life. Every single thing he wanted, he got – knowledge, wealth, popularity, wisdom, power, along with 700 wives and 300 concubines. If you know Solomon's story, you also therefore are aware that he followed all of those wives into their pagan idolatry and drifted from that good place he had once enjoyed.

But that would be an over-simplified look at the life of Solomon. He wasn't like some modern-day lottery winner who let fame and fortune ruin him. God used Solomon not just to warn us about the dangers of wine, women, and song; he raised up Solomon and preserved his story in order to teach us something about our *own* lives – where we are, where want to be, and where we *should* be. In short, God here gave us a timeless message with universal application.

In his first Book, Proverbs, Solomon laid out the path of wisdom. The Book is much more than just a collection of the wise sayings of his day. It was and is the divine blueprint for a full and happy life. Those who listen to the words and actually follow the advice there offered will find themselves on a very pleasant path.

In his second Book, Ecclesiastes, the Holy Spirit through Solomon lays out the inevitable result of adopting any other course in life. More than that, he emphasizes the utter futility and emptiness of any existence that lacks the necessary relationship with our Savior-God. Do you remember the account of the Rich Young Man? Perfect example of how hollow and empty even an outwardly exemplary life can be without a relationship with Jesus Christ.

Why is this so critical? Why so universally important? Because by nature every single human being has dreams and aspirations, and those dreams and aspirations almost always revolve around or focus on that which holds the potential for tremendous spiritual harm.

That means that for a Christian who is on the right path, the Book of Ecclesiastes - including also our text for this morning - is primarily a book of comfort. Who here this morning hasn't experienced feelings of "missing out" somehow? Who hasn't dreamed, at one time or another, of bigger and better? Who hasn't looked longingly at that which seems always to be just beyond your reach? Have you ever, for example, what it would be like to have a couple million adoring fans? Have you seen folks with unlimited financial resources and wondered what it would be like to never have to worry about money, or what it would feel like to be able to buy absolutely anything that your heart desired? Have you ever wished you had enough

money to be able to shower your family and friends with whatever *their* hearts desired and to experience the joy and satisfaction something like that would bring? What would it be like to have people pay just to watch you perform, or to be instantly recognized wherever you go and to have folks ask you for your autograph?

Solomon lived just such a life, and in Proverbs and Ecclesiastes he tells all of us (who haven't) just exactly what it is like. By the time he wrote Ecclesiastes Solomon is believed to have been an old man, having travelled from the horizon of his birth to the horizon of his old age, and he wants to share something with each of us about that journey. He wants to leave you – you who could well spend a lifetime frustrating yourself by trying to gain what he was given – he wants to leave *you* with the sort of advice that only someone that's been there can really offer.

His timeless advice? *"Don't bother."* Really, don't bother. All of that stuff is vanity. All is pointless, useless, hollow. It's all a grand deception – a vapor without substance. It's the carrot and stick that Satan uses to drive us where he wants us to go. Solomon begins our text with this simple summary: ***"He who loves money will not be satisfied with money, nor he who loves wealth with his income; this also is vanity."***

The root problem here is that mankind naturally feels a void of sorts, an emptiness that he cannot quite understand or explain and a longing for something more, never quite sure of what that something is. Yet since we want that void filled, we grasp for all those things that seem like they might somehow satisfy that intangible longing. All of this is the inevitable result of mankind's fall into sin. Sinful man knows instinctively that something is wrong, that something is missing. What escapes non-Christians is the realization that the problem is our broken relationship with our God, and a need that can only be filled by a Savior.

The cruel irony here is that while that longing is never really satisfied by stuff, it *seems* at times like we are almost there – or that we are *getting* there. Power, prestige, wealth, popularity, pleasure – all seem only to *almost* satisfy because those things give us a temporary thrill or a momentary respite from the longing. They are like drugs that make you yearn for just a bit more, which will then certainly be enough. Only it never is.

Solomon here gives us the absolute, rock-solid, bottom line: ***those things never get you where you want to go; they never fulfill or satisfy the longing.*** In fact he gives an example in our text of something I suspect many of you have experienced. ***"When goods increase, they increase who eat them, and what advantage has their owner but to***

see them with his eyes?" Has this ever happened to you? It has to me. You just get to the point where you think you are starting to get ahead of the game and something comes along to wipe it all out. The bonus you got at work is consumed by unexpected car repairs. The extra money from that second job gets poured into unanticipated medical bills. The raise at work just barely covers rising expenses for food and gas, and that inheritance that you had anticipated for so long was somehow only enough to preserve what you already had.

The profound message Solomon wants to convey to us is belied by its very simplicity: **"Behold, what I have seen to be good and fitting is to eat and drink and find enjoyment in all the toil with which one toils under the sun the few days of his life that God has given him, for this is his lot."** The world stands with mouths agape at such a message. It's certainly neither what they wanted nor expected when seeking the secret of life. They want to believe in "happily ever after" – as though "getting there" or "making it" is actually achievable, and that once there "happily ever after" is possible. The path they choose never gets them there. The path that the Holy Spirit through Solomon lays out in our text, on the other hand, is a sure thing. Every single time.

The fact is you and I can only live quietly contented in this life because of the forgiveness that is ours through faith in Jesus Christ. Our greatest joy is therefore not our own obedience, but the perfect obedience of our Savior, which is now credited to our account. Our sins won't be forgiven some day; they are forgiven *now*. Solomon summed up his lifetime of experience in the final chapter of Ecclesiastes: **"The end of the matter; all has been heard. Fear God and keep his commandments, for this is the whole duty of man."** The best news of all is that we now struggle to live obedient lives not in fear of punishment but in the joy of forgiveness. We are God's beloved children – heirs of eternal life. All has been done *for us*, and given *to us*, by our Savior Jesus. Life then on this earth is about thanking our God with the time that he gives us. Nothing in this life could ever be worth risking the eternity that Jesus Christ has earned for us when he paid the sin-debt we had accumulated.

This simple gospel message reminds us, moment by moment, that the only way we can possibly "miss out" during our time of grace on earth is if we wander – if we sacrifice the perfect thing we have been given by Jesus Christ for the myth of something better. Having been brought to faith, the only possible failure is to reject or discard the priceless gift of forgiveness that is ours through faith in Jesus Christ. From the perspective of heaven we will never regret not earning more, or lost fame, or the fact that we were never important or famous in the eyes of the world. We will there only regret the opportunities for humble, faithful service that we missed, the contentment we forfeited, and the frustrations we brought upon ourselves.

God the Holy Spirit keep us grounded and focused. We are saved by grace through faith. We are not "settling" for something less. We have been given the very best life has to offer. Do not allow anyone to convince you otherwise. Amen.

Scripture Readings

^{ESV} **Hebrews 4:1-13** Therefore, while the promise of entering his rest still stands, let us fear lest any of you should seem to have failed to reach it. ² For good news came to us just as to them, but the message they heard did not benefit them, because they were not united by faith with those who listened. ³ For we who have believed enter that rest, as he has said, "As I swore in my wrath, 'They shall not enter my rest,'" although his works were finished from the foundation of the world. ⁴ For he has somewhere spoken of the seventh day in this way: "And God rested on the seventh day from all his works." ⁵ And again in this passage he said, "They shall not enter my rest." ⁶ Since therefore it remains for some to enter it, and those who formerly received the good news failed to enter because of disobedience, ⁷ again he appoints a certain day, "Today," saying through David so long afterward, in the words already quoted, "Today, if you hear his voice, do not harden your hearts." ⁸ For if Joshua had given them rest, God would not have spoken of another day later on. ⁹ So then, there remains a Sabbath rest for the people of God, ¹⁰ for whoever has entered God's rest has also rested from his works as God did from his. ¹¹ ¶ Let us therefore strive to enter that rest, so that no one may fall by the same sort of disobedience. ¹² For the word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing to the division of soul and of spirit, of joints and of marrow, and discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart. ¹³ And no creature is hidden from his sight, but all are naked and exposed to the eyes of him to whom we must give account.

^{ESV} **Mark 10:23-31** And Jesus looked around and said to his disciples, "How difficult it will be for those who have wealth to enter the kingdom of God!" ²⁴ And the disciples were amazed at his words. But Jesus said to them again, "Children, how difficult it is to enter the kingdom of God! ²⁵ It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich person to enter the kingdom of God." ²⁶ And they were exceedingly astonished, and said to him, "Then who can be saved?" ²⁷ Jesus looked at them and said, "With man it is impossible, but not with God. For all things are possible with God." ²⁸ Peter began to say to him, "See, we have left everything and followed you." ²⁹ Jesus said, "Truly, I say to you, there is no one who has left house or brothers or sisters or mother or father or children or lands, for my sake and for the gospel, ³⁰ who will not receive a hundredfold now in this time, houses and brothers and sisters and mothers and children and lands, with persecutions, and in the age to come eternal life. ³¹ But many who are first will be last, and the last first."

ST. PAUL EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN CHURCH

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21st Sunday after Pentecost – October 18, 2015

The Opening Prayer by the Pastor

The Opening Hymn – 12 *(Red Hymnal)*

"This Day at Thy Creating Word"

The Order of Service – Supplement page 12ff. *(Brown Hymnal)*

The Scripture Lessons: *(Printed on the back page of this bulletin)*

(Hebrews 4:1-13) Our two readings this morning combine to warn us that to almost finish a race is the same as losing that race. This is not intended to alarm Christians but to remind them to exercise caution. Human beings have the frightening power to throw away the gift of eternal life that has been won for us by our Savior Jesus. Our first lesson reminds us that the struggle will not end until we are called home.

Psalm 85 (Supplement page 40) *(Brown Hymnal)*

The Second Lesson: (Mark 10:23-31) The disciples believed that material wealth was a certain sign of God's favor. Jesus disabused them of this notion and pointed out instead the inherent danger of material wealth. Recognizing that each one of us here today is immeasurably wealthier than the people of Jesus' day, we would be foolish indeed to ignore the loving reminder our Lord offers in our Gospel lesson.

The Confession of Faith -

The Apostolic Creed – page 15 *(Brown Hymnal)*

The Pre-Sermon Hymn – 292 *(Verses 1-4) (Red Hymnal)*

"Lord Jesus Christ, with Us Abide"

The Sermon – Text: Ecclesiastes 5:10-20 *(Printed on the back page of this bulletin)*

"Occupied with Joy"

The Offertory – (Supplement page 16 insert)

The Post-Sermon Hymn - 292 *(Verses 7-9) (Red Hymnal)*

"Lord Jesus Christ, with Us Abide"

The Offering

The Prayer followed by the Lord's Prayer

The Benediction

The Closing Hymn -283 *(Red Hymnal)*

"God's Word Is Our Great Heritage"

Silent Prayer

Welcome! - We warmly welcome any visitors who might be with us this morning and invite you to join us every Sunday at this time. St. Paul is a congregation in fellowship with the Church of the Lutheran Confession (CLC) – a conservative Lutheran synod with churches and missions throughout the United States, as well as Canada, India, and Africa. We are glad you are here. Thank you for letting us share the Word of God with you. Please record your visit in our Guest Book, and come again!

Attendance - Last Sunday (41) Average (50)

This Week at St. Paul:

Today	-9:00 a.m.	– Sunday School and Bible Class
	-10:00 a.m.	– Sunday Worship Service
	-11:00 a.m.	– Coffee/Fellowship Time
Wednesday	-6:00 p.m.	– Confirmation Class
	-7:00 p.m.	– Midweek Bible Study
Next Sunday	-9:00 a.m.	– Sunday School and Bible Class
	-10:00 a.m.	– Sunday Worship w/communion
	-11:15 a.m.	– Coffee/Fellowship Time

CLC News – Immanuel Lutheran College in Eau Claire, WI is offering on-line courses for credit or to audit as part of individual growth. Please contact Pastor Roehl if you would like more information. A review of our Synod's financial picture is available on the entry table.

Christmas Flowers – The deadline is approaching to order Christmas flowers. Please consult the sign-up sheet on the mailbox table or speak to Eileen.

Council Meeting Notes – The Church Council met on October 11. Mark and Dawn Redlin, who are moving to Brady, TX (an area where there is no CLC church) have transferred their membership back here to St Paul. They will be fed on a weekly basis through recorded services on our website. There are 5 young people in this year's Confirmation Class. Treasurer Adams reported that offerings for the month exceeded budgeted needs by \$1,622 and YTD offerings have exceeded budgeted needs by \$3,832. To avoid giving the impression that we perform non-member funerals, the title of one of our church policies was changed from "Guidelines for Non-Member Funerals" to "Guidelines for Memorial Services." One ILC student is being supported this year through our ILC Education Fund. Our head organist was asked to give a report to the Council concerning her research on a new organ. A full report will be presented to the congregation once we have gathered all necessary information. The next Council meeting is scheduled for November 22.