

31 July 2016
Pentecost 11

St. Athanasius Lutheran Church
Vienna, VA

Jesu Juva

“Our Inheritance in Christ”

Text: Ecclesiastes 1-2; Colossians 3:1-11; Luke 12:13-21

Grace, mercy, and peace to you from God our Father, and from our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. Amen.

Solomon was not happy. He had a vast and prosperous kingdom. He was one of the wealthiest men on earth. By all standards today, he would be considered a great and successful man. But he looked around at it all *and despaired*. It doesn't mean anything. ***All is vanity***, he said. I'm going to die and someone after me is going to get it all. Someone who hasn't worked for it. Someone who may be a fool. What's the point?

There is some wisdom and truth in what Solomon says here. I remember some 11 years ago, cleaning out part of the house I grew up in after my mother died, and then doing it again about 3 years ago after my father moved in with us. There was a lot of stuff in that house! All kinds of stuff. All useful in its time. All bought with the thought that these things would be used and needed. And they probably were. But then in a moment, from one day to the next, all that stuff was needed no more. In a moment, its true value was revealed.

Set your minds on things that are above, not on things that are on earth, St. Paul said. ***For you have died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God.***

You have died, St. Paul says. Like my mother died and no longer needed all the stuff she had accumulated over the years. ***You have died***, St. Paul says. That's baptismal talk. Dying and rising with Christ in those waters. ***You have died***, St. Paul says, so your life really isn't here anymore, in the things of this world. ***It is hidden with Christ in God.***

So ***set you minds there***, he says. Yet how hard that is to do! How hard to do consistently. Maybe because the things of this world are so present, so always before our eyes. So it's so easy to focus on them, rather than on the life given us by Christ.

But not just that. St. Paul actually takes what Solomon says to another level. For, he says, when we don't set our minds on things above, but instead set our minds on the things “here below,” the things of this world and life, that is *not just vanity* but produces in man ***sexual immorality, impurity, passion, evil desire, and covetousness, which is idolatry.*** And then he goes on to add to that list ***anger, wrath, malice, slander, and obscene talk from your mouth.*** For these all come from trying to get what we want here; trying to

preserve what we have here. Which breeds competition instead of brotherhood, anger when someone else gets what I want or think I deserve, and *covetousness, which is idolatry*. Which is fearing, loving, or trusting anyone or anything other than God.

Now contrast that to the life of the world to come, the life of heaven. Where there are no haves and have nots. No you and me. No *against*. [No] *Greek and Jew, circumcised and uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave, free; but Christ is all, and in all*. Unity in Christ. That too is baptismal talk from Paul. And that unity our Lord has begun and is ours here and now . . . just not yet in its heavenly fullness. Sin disrupts and destroys this unity. Christ creates and restores it.

Perhaps an example of that might be the Malekzadeh family. When I moved here some 14 years ago, we went out one day looking for a pizza place. We stumbled upon Maleks and ate there. *It was okay*. But there was no unity between us, between my family and theirs - we just ate there. But a couple years later, the Malekzadehs came to our church, and then we had a unity not present outside the church. God had brought us together into the fellowship of His Son.

And you, too. God has brought us together here, in this church, to rejoice together, struggle together, live together. To be His blessing to one another. *To set our minds on things above* together. Not that the things of this world and life are unimportant. We need pizza, God created pizza for us, and we should share and care and thank God for all that He has given us. But the pizza is not what binds us together. It is secondary to Christ, His fellowship, and His promises of life.

Which is what Jesus was talking about in His parable today. His parable of what Solomon was talking about, and a summary of what St. Paul was writing about. Which Jesus concludes with the warning: *So is the one who lays up treasure for himself and is not rich toward God*. He, too, like the man in the parable, is a rich fool.

For the man in the parable has been extraordinarily blessed by God. But he kept it all for himself. He was *not rich toward God*, meaning to give and share with those in need. Or as Jesus would later explain it: *Truly, I say to you, as you did it to one of the least of these my brothers, you did it to me* (Matthew 25:40). It is to know and believe that the things of this world serve a greater purpose. They are not ends in themselves; trophies or rewards to hoard. It is not that the one who dies with the most toys wins. Life is more than that. Life is greater than that. **So set your minds on things above, in order to see the things of this world aright; to see the things of this world through the eyes of God.**

Perhaps the difference between how God sees things and how we often see things is the same as it is between parents and children. A parent can walk into their child's room and see nothing but junk. And often ask: *Why do you keep all this junk?!* But the child doesn't see junk, but treasure! I need all this stuff. It's important to them. There are memories

attached. So it's kept.

God lets us keep our "junk" too. It's just when our junk becomes too important . . . When our stuff becomes our gods - where we seek our life and meaning and value and importance and pride. Then it's no treasure, but an idol. Idols which may even cause us to go to Jesus and plead (like in the Holy Gospel today): *Jesus, tell my brother to divide the inheritance with me! I need it.*

[Face palm!]

It's like after the Feeding of the 5,000, when the people chased after Jesus the next day because they thought free lunches were pretty cool. And Jesus tells them: *I'm trying to teach you about greater bread, not just sandwiches!*

So here: Jesus is trying to teach about true treasures, but too often we're focused on other treasures. *It's not fair, Jesus! He needs to divide the inheritance with me!*

But here's what Jesus is all about. Here's what He's been teaching. Here's the point of all these readings today . . . What Jesus is all about is this: **If you want an inheritance, have mine!** Jesus came not just to *divide* His inheritance with you, but to give it to you. All of it! Or to put it in Solomon's words: **I'm going to die and someone after me is going to get it all.** YES! YES! Jesus is going to die, and we're going to get it all.

Is that foolish? No - foolish is turning that down! Turning that down for the things of this world. No, that's God. That's who He is. A giving God. A God that the world thinks foolish in His mercy and grace.

For you see, the same sin that disrupts and destroys our unity with one another in this world, had first disrupted and destroyed our unity with God. So God sent His Son to restore and recreate that unity. To give us back again what we lost. So Jesus became cursed with our curse and *disinherited* for us on the cross. No mercy, no kindness, no gifts on the cross - just forsakenness and wrath. Yet in taking our place there, He gave us His place as a son of the Father - a place of only love and mercy and kindness. That **in His death** our sins be atoned for and forgiven, **in His resurrection** we be raised once again to the life that we had lost, and **in His ascension** we too ascend and receive His kingdom, His inheritance.

Jesus talked about that with His disciples that night before His crucifixion. He said, *In my Father's house are many rooms. If it were not so, would I have told you that I go to prepare a place for you? And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and will take you to myself, that where I am you may be also* (John 14:2-3). Now if that is so, why bother building bigger barns for all your stuff? Why bother when we have what Jesus is preparing for us in heaven? And why think like the rich fool - **I will say to my**

soul, Soul, you have ample goods laid up for many years; relax, eat, drink, be merry - when your Father in heaven has more for you than that? When He has for you not just a feast that will last *many years*, but the wedding feast of the Lamb which has no end?

So clinging to the things here, of this world and life, really is pretty foolish, really is pretty meaningless. When Jesus is saying to you: *I have so much more for you*. Satan wants to seduce you away from Jesus and His more to the less of this world and life. But Jesus comes with the truth, for you. With His gifts, for you. With *Himself*, for you.

So come eat and drink now at His Table, where He is for you - His Body and Blood, once cursed and crucified for you, now risen and given to you for the forgiveness of your sins and the feeding of your new life in Christ. This is the new **testament**, Jesus says. His last will and testament. The **inheritance** He has left behind for you.

So come eat and drink, though maybe you do so not in merriness - for maybe you are under great burdens right now; sadness and sorrow; troubles and trials. They are a reminder of the *now but not yet*. The new life we have now, but not yet in its heavenly fullness. The inheritance we have now, but not yet in its heavenly fullness. The joy and peace and unity in Christ we have now, but not yet in its heavenly fullness. **But don't, then, seek for the fullness elsewhere**. Where is cannot be found. Know that what you receive here is the foretaste of the full feast to come. A foretaste of the feast. A foretaste of the life. A foretaste of the joy. A foretaste of the unity. A foretaste of the rest. Of the fullness that is coming, that is yours in Christ.

Set your minds on that. And then *when Christ who is your life appears, you also will appear with him in* [the fullness of His] *glory*.

In the Name of the Father, and of the (+) Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Now the peace of God which passes all understanding, keep your hearts and minds through faith in Christ Jesus, our Lord. Amen.