

Our regular lives have disrupted by the lingering threats of the Coronavirus. Unfortunately, the attending pressures have caused churches to limit their services or to cancel them altogether. So we're going to miss our gatherings of the remainder of our mid-week services in Lent.

There are many devotional resources, including sermons, that are available. But perhaps a series of sermons coming from your home congregation will be of more interest to you. So Our Savior is sending out 6 sermons by e-mail.

The texts for the sermons are drawn from Ecclesiastes, a book we don't often read. It is a dark book in many ways. But the accents of the book, plus texts with the good news, are very appropriate for God's people whose hope is in Christ alone.

- Ron Richeson, retired pastor

Read: Ecclesiastes 1:2; 1 Corinthians 15:56-58

All Is Vanity, Except in Christ

The Bible lays out the truth, and sometimes the truth hurts. When we read the truth in Genesis 3, it hurts to see Adam and Eve disobey in eating the forbidden fruit. It's painful to read because sin entered into God's good creation. But it is also painful because that chapter is about you and me—how easily we can be fooled into changing or rebelling against God's Word. There are many other painful truths in the Bible that show us our sin and weakness.

Most of the entire book of Ecclesiastes is in that category. It is filled with painful truth, and it begins with the brutal blow to the spirit, "Vanity of vanities. All is vanity." "Vanity" is empty pride; a self-consciousness without meaning. So life boils down to futility. Life is as a vapor, a mist that puffs up and then is gone. Most of the book explains this conclusion. The author traveled every avenue to chase happiness—wealth, wisdom, partying, hard work. But each road was a dead end. Sad, but true in this imperfect world.

Could it be that everyone is that depressed? Perhaps most of us would not put ourselves in that category. We don't like to say, "I'm depressed." I hope you don't wake up every morning saying, "All is vanity."

But the evidence of the truth of Ecclesiastes is all around. Who among us has not been frustrated and thought, "What is the point of trying?" We bounce back from those depressions, but they still come.

And who among us has not known someone who doesn't care? Whose way of life screams, "Nothing matters!" The worker who puts in his time without trying to do his best, then goes to the bar after work because he doesn't want to go home. The neighbor who cares nothing about her weight or appearance. The teenager who seems jolly, but just bounces from one fad to another without accomplishing anything. The young child in school who sees no reason to learn or to behave or to practice good manners or to respect anyone because there's no pay-off.

We know people who float thru life in these ways, as ghosts with nothing solid in their lives. Maybe they try to fill up their existence with alcohol or drug fixes or a stream of boy friends or all the latest gadgets. But they're going no where. All is vanity for them.

Here is a passage from Ephesians 4, with a few words changed:

Don't live as the [pagans] do, in the futility [*vanity*] of their thinking. They are darkened and separated from the life of God.... Having lost all sensitivity, they have given themselves over to sensuality in every kind of impurity, with a continual lust for more.

Again, this is not to depress you. But Ecclesiastes shows us how life beats people down. Sometimes we bounce back by simply *obeying*—just going to work or school and forcing ourselves to do what we should. But for many people right in our neighborhoods—and *for you* sometimes—the endless causes for frustration are too much and people look at themselves in the mirror and wonder, “What is the point?” They are desensitized to life as God made it. All is vanity.

The Bible tells us the painful truth about ourselves and life in this imperfect world. But it also tells us that there is a deeper meaning to life than what we can find on our own. Re-read that quote from Ephesians above, then what follows:

[but] you did not come to know Christ that way.... You were taught... to be made new in the attitude of your minds, and to put on the new self, created to be like God in true righteousness and holiness. (here, and above, Ephesians 4:17-24)

There, in Christ, is God's answer to the despair of, “all is vanity.” No, your life is not meaningless, no matter how many frustrations you have to endure. You were taught that God has given you new life in Christ so you can live like him and have hope from out of this world. You are dust and ashes, but you're *more* than that—you're created to be like God.

We all need to hear this regularly because life wears us down. And there are so many people close to us who need to hear that again and again and again. “God loves you and Christ died for you. Whatever you've done or failed to do, God forgives, so you have some hope to live and to be a better person.” That's not a difficult witness to learn and to repeat to people around you, but it can be life-changing. From vanity to hope.

We live in a place and time where people are puzzling and manipulating plotting and grabbing to take something from life. We live in a place and time that is crawling with microscopic beasts that undermine our health and relationships. There is no end to these maladies, and, in the end, all is vanity. *But you did not learn Christ that way.* In following Christ, we learn that meaning for life is in what we can *give*, not what we can grab. Live that way, in reverence for Christ—give yourself as the best parent, the best plumber, the best teacher, the best homemaker, the best student, the best citizen you can be. Then you have faith that, “all is *not* vanity, for Christ gave himself for me, and for you, too. There is God's answer.