

August 3, 2025 – Ecclesiastes 1:2, 12-14; 2:18-26; Colossians 3:1-11; Luke 12:13-21

We don't use the word vanity much anymore. If we do, we usually think of someone who's obsessed with their appearance, or maybe a little table with a mirror on it. But that's not what Solomon means in our Old Testament lesson. The Hebrew word here is *hevel*, and it doesn't mean pride or arrogance.

It means vapor, mist, breath. Something fleeting. Something you see for a moment and then it's gone. It's real, but it doesn't last. You can't grab it. You can't hold onto it. It slips through your fingers. And that's how Solomon describes everything in life "under the sun."

When he says "vanity of vanities," he's not being melodramatic. He's being brutally honest. Solomon had more wisdom, more wealth, and more accomplishments than any of us ever will. He had seen it all. And looking back, he calls it all *hevel*: empty, fleeting, unsatisfying, meaningless.

Perhaps you know that feeling. You pour yourself into your job, your home, your legacy. You plan carefully, work faithfully, and dream ambitiously. But for what? The moment you slow down enough to breathe, the questions come flooding in: "Will it last?" "Will they remember?" "Was it even worth it?"

That's exactly where Solomon finds himself. He says, "*I hated all my toil in which I toil under the sun.*" That's not a complaint from someone who failed. That's the confession of someone who succeeded... and still found himself empty.

He had achieved more than we can imagine. He had great projects, vast estates, enormous wealth. But even with all that, he saw the same end awaiting him as a complete fool. And worse yet, he had no control over what would happen to everything he had built once he was gone. In death, everything in this life would be *hevel*. Meaningless.

That's the frustration of toil: you work and you worry and you build and you sweat. But you can't take it with you. You can't keep any of it. Eventually, it all slips through your hands like vapor. That's life "under the sun."

And yet we keep trying. We chase satisfaction through effort, meaning through money, legacy through labor. We try to control what we cannot keep. We try to earn what we cannot buy. We try to outsmart death and futility through hard work and anxious planning.

Jesus tells a parable about a man like that. In our Gospel lesson, a rich man has a bumper crop. So what does he do? He tears down his barns and builds bigger ones. He lays up treasure for himself and says, "*Soul, you have ample goods laid up for many years. Relax. Eat. Drink. Be merry.*" But God calls him a fool. "*This very night your soul is required of you, and the things you have prepared—whose will they be?*"

"*So it is,*" Jesus says, "*with the one who lays up treasure for himself and is not rich toward God.*" That parable could have come straight from Ecclesiastes. The man in it wasn't evil. At least, not from a worldly perspective. He was just doing what everyone else does: working, planning, providing. And there truly is nothing evil in those things by themselves.

No, the sin he had committed was not simply in being prosperous. The sin was in believing the lie that his work could bring him peace. That his possessions could secure his future. That his soul could rest because his barns were full.

That lie still lives in our hearts. It's the voice that says, "If I just work a little harder, then I'll be safe. If I just save a little more, then I'll be content. If I just succeed a little further, then I'll be satisfied." But that voice is a liar, sent from the father of lies. It never speaks the truth.

No, the problem here isn't in the work itself. Because, you see, work wasn't always frustrating. In the beginning, work was a joy. God placed Adam in the garden to tend it. Labor was part of God's good creation. It was fruitful and fulfilling.

But when sin entered the world, so did the curse. *“Cursed is the ground because of you; in pain you shall eat of it... By the sweat of your face you shall eat bread, until you return to the ground.”*

That’s the burden we carry. Because of sin, our fruitful, fulfilling labor became toil. Our work became worry. Our joy became greed. And ultimately, no matter how hard we try, we still return to the dust. And everything becomes hevel. Empty. Meaningless.

And here’s the worst part: instead of turning to God, we try to lift the curse ourselves. We make work our god. We try to justify our lives by our success. We try to measure our worth by what we produce. We seek comfort and control in things we cannot keep.

Paul warns against this in our Epistle lesson. *“Set your minds on things above,”* he says, *“not on things that are on earth. For you have died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God.”*

We’re called to look up to eternal things. But we keep looking down – down to our ledgers, our calendars, our bank accounts – as though they could give us life. And all the while, we grow more anxious, more weary, more afraid. Until despair begins to creep in.

It’s easy to see Solomon’s words in Ecclesiastes as words of despair. As a pessimistic man who has given up on everyone and everything. But Solomon isn’t pessimistic. He’s realistic. And he doesn’t despair. For, eventually, he sees something more. Something better.

*“There is nothing better for a person 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?”*

At first glance, you might think he’s in agreement with the man from our parable. They both speak of eating, drinking, and finding enjoyment, after all. But if you look more closely, you find that their motivation is completely different.

The man in the parable is eating, drinking, and finding enjoyment because he has *“ample goods laid up for many years.”* He’s found satisfaction and even salvation in his own works. His own efforts. His own preparation. Satisfaction and salvation that turns out to be complete foolishness.

But Solomon? Solomon’s enjoyment doesn’t come from his own effort. It comes from God. He recognizes that everything is from the hand of God, for apart from him who can eat or have any enjoyment.

And that’s the wisdom Solomon wants us to know: Work doesn’t become meaningful by how much we achieve, but by whether we receive it as a gift from the one who gives us every good thing.

Solomon began by looking at everything “under the sun” and found only hevel. Vanity and emptiness. But now he lifts his eyes above the sun. Above the curse of sin and death. Above the frustration of life. And there he sees that joy is not something you build or earn or store in barns. It’s something that comes from the hand of God.

It’s something that comes from the hand of Christ. For Jesus came into this world and took on our burden. He labored under the sun. He bore our futility. He sweat and suffered and died. He took the full weight of the curse on Himself, so that He might give you rest.

Not just rest from earthly work, but rest for your soul. The kind of rest that lets you sleep in peace whether the barns are full or whether they’re empty. The kind of rest that lets you rejoice in your labor whether it’s noticed by everyone or whether it’s noticed by no one. The kind of rest that frees you to stop striving after the wind and start trusting the one who made this whole earth and everything in it for you.

In Christ, your work is no longer meaningless. It is sanctified by His own labor and sacrifice. It becomes service to your neighbor, not a measure of your worth. It becomes an offering of thanksgiving, not a desperate search for control. And even the most ordinary gifts – your daily bread, your morning coffee, your quiet evening – become signs of God’s goodness to you.

Paul says later in this same chapter of Colossians, *“Whatever you do, work heartily, as for the Lord and not for men... You are serving the Lord Christ.”* That means you don’t need to fear the futility anymore. You don’t need to chase the wind. You don’t need to build bigger barns. You don’t need to prove yourself. You are hidden with Christ in God. His resurrection is your future. His rest is your peace. His joy is your strength.

So go to your job, whether that’s an office, a farm, a classroom, or a kitchen. Do your work, and do it well. But don’t hang your hope on it. Don’t build your soul around it. Receive it. Give thanks for it. And know that whether you eat or drink, whether you labor or rest, whether you build or let go, your life is held in the hands of God.

In Christ, even your toil becomes joy. Because your future is not hevel. It is not empty. It is not meaningless. It is not vain. Your future is with him. Amen.