



Pentecost 8

August 3, 2025

St. Timothy Lutheran Church, Portland, OR

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

THE SERMON: “You’re So Vain...Life Is Not About You...”

Grace and Peace to you in the NAME of GOD: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Amen.

INTRODUCTION

Three years ago I told about this incident when I worked as a part-time chaplain at Craigsides Retirement Center in Honolulu and I sometimes thought of the residents as “old folks,” forgetting that I was older than some of the residents. During a Bible study, one of the ladies said, in front of the whole group, “I can’t believe you’re a minister because you’re so handsome.” As I puffed up with pride, she added, “Of course my eyesight isn’t what it used to be.” After I told this story, one of the members of St. Tim flattered me by commenting that her eyesight was still good. Of course that reminded me of our lesson from Ecclesiastes and the truth of the Teacher’s observation, “Vanity of vanities... vanity of vanities! All is vanity.” Then, I thought about the 1972 hit by Carly Simon who sang, “You’re so vain. You probably think this song is about you. You’re so vain, I’ll bet you think this song is about you. Don’t you?” I have to admit that, at first, I thought most of you wouldn’t even know the song or who Carly Simon is. But, then, I realized that most of you were in your 20s or 30s in 1972. But, I’m so vain that I think I’m still a kid and you folks are old. Obviously, I’m vain like that high school girl who went to Confession and told the priest, “Bless me, Father, for I have sinned.” The priest answered, “What is it, child?” The girl said, “Father, I have committed the sin of vanity. Twice a day I gaze at myself in the mirror and tell myself how beautiful I am.”

The priest took a good look through the confessional peephole at the girl and told her, "My dear, I have good news. That isn't a sin - it's only a mistake or bad eyesight."

Ecclesiastes 1:2,12-14,18-23

It's a mistake when we think life is about us. As Carly Simon said in her song, "You're so vain. You probably think this song is about you. You're so vain... I bet you think this song is about you. Don't you?..." That's basically what Solomon was saying in our first lesson, "Vanity of vanities... What do mortals get from all the toil and strain with which they toil under the sun? For all their days are full of pain, and their work is a vexation; even at night their minds do not rest." Most people think that the Teacher in Ecclesiastes was Solomon and he basically laments that, no matter how hard we work, in time someone else is going to get what we labored for. In other words, we can't take it with us when we die. After all his complaints, the Teacher tells us that all human endeavors, including wisdom, wealth, labor, and pleasure, should ultimately lead individuals to depend on and honor God. Life is about our relationship to God and to others. To paraphrase Carly Simon, "You're so vain if you think life is about you."

Psalms 49

The psalmist picks up the same theme in Psalm 49, "My mouth shall speak wisdom... Why should I fear in times of trouble... those who trust in their wealth and boast of the abundance of their riches? Truly, no ransom avails for one's life... For the ransom of life is costly and can never suffice..." And, then, the psalmist echoes Ecclesiastes by saying, "When we look at the wise, they die; fool and dolt perish together and leave their wealth to others." And, like the Teacher in Ecclesiastes, the psalmist points out that we humans don't have the answers; that's vanity; so he writes, "Hear this, all you peoples... both low and high, rich and poor together. My mouth shall speak wisdom; the meditation of my heart shall be understanding." And, that reminds us of the passage in the Proverbs, "The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom, and knowledge of the Holy One is understanding." In the wisdom of Alcoholics Anonymous, we should "Let go and let God!" Even though I know all of this, I still think life is about me. Even though I

know Jesus told the disciples at the Last Supper, “Let not your hearts be troubled. Believe in God, believe also in me...”, I still worry. Why? Like Adam and Eve, I want to be like God. I want to be in control.

Luke 12:13-21

It seems like I’m a lot like that bystander in the crowd that wanted Jesus to tell his brother to divide the family inheritance. I want things to go my way. I want to be in control. But, Jesus quickly shows us that we aren’t in control when he tells the crowd about a rich man who thought he was the master of his destiny. When he saw how his land produced abundantly, the rich man planned how he would store his crops saying, “... I will pull down my barns and build larger ones, and there I will store all my grain and my goods. And I will say... you have ample goods laid up for many years; relax, eat, drink, be merry.” Then, God responds, “You fool! This very night your life is being demanded of you. And the things you have prepared, whose will they be?” And, Jesus adds, “So it is with those who store up treasures for themselves but are not rich toward God.” In her commentary on this parable, the Rev. Dr. Jennifer S. Wyant - a United Methodist elder in the North Georgia Annual Conference and a New Testament instructor at Candler School of Theology in Atlanta, GA, observed that the rich man’s mistake isn’t how he made his money. It’s what he believed it could do for him. He put his trust in his possessions and not in God. That’s what made him foolish. As St. Paul told Timothy in his first letter, “For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil.” And Jesus teaches later in this chapter, “Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat; or about your body, what you will wear. For life is more than food, and the body more than clothes. Consider the ravens: They do not sow or reap, they have no storeroom or barn; yet God feeds them. And how much more valuable you are than birds! ...Consider how the wild flowers grow. They do not labor or spin. Yet I tell you, not even Solomon in all his splendor was dressed like one of these... And do not set your heart on what you will eat or drink; do not worry about it... But seek his kingdom, and these things will be given to you as well... For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.”

Colossians 3:1-11, The Call and the Challenge

Paul is pretty much saying the same thing in our lesson from the letter to the Colossians, “Set your minds on the things that are above, not on the things that are on earth... and your life is hidden with Christ in God. When Christ who is your life is revealed, then you also will be revealed with him in glory.” When others see God’s love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control in us, then Christ will be revealed. As that old camp song says, “They will know we are Christians...” But, because the church is made up of imperfect people, there are going to be some problems and Paul addresses them in the Colossian church, “Put to death, therefore, whatever in you is earthly... But now you must get rid of all such things: anger, wrath, malice, slander, and abusive language from your mouth. Do not lie to one another, seeing that you have stripped off the old self with its practices and have clothed yourselves with the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge according to the image of its creator.” With the perception that many people have of the church, maybe Christians need to walk the talk and live lives that bear the fruit of God’s Spirit: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. As Paul taught and our hymn reminds us, Jesus is the Son of God and the source of life and truth and grace. With all the chaos and worrisome news, we know that there are spirits in pain and sorrow, crushed and broken, and Christ is calling us to soothe their care. The hymn also reminds us, instead of building silos to store God’s harvest for ourselves as the rich man did in Jesus’ parable, God has freely granted His gifts to us so that we are merely stewards of God’s bounty and that we may freely give. God is love and we are stewards of that love. So, Paul urges us to strip off the old self with its self-centered religiosity and cloth ourselves in the new self renewed in knowledge according to the image of our Creator. God is love so let us be the embodiment of that love.