

Grace, mercy and peace be to you from our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen.
Amen.

Before we get started, I'd like you to open your hymnals to page 322. We're going to discuss the creeds. It won't happen right away, so just put a marker in there so you can get to it when I get there. But first we're going to look at Ecclesiastes. Now, this is not a book of the Bible that we read about very often, and if you listen very carefully, you'll hear a very old and bitter man. I mean, that's what it sounds like, doesn't it? Everything is vanity. Everything's going to hell in a hand basket. Nothing is good. It's all horrible. Life is vanity and it's striving after wind. Not a whole lot of hope, not a lot of positivity, not a lot of joy in this statement.

Now, who wrote the book of Ecclesiastes? Solomon did. Remember Solomon? He's the child of David and Bathsheba for that matter. So he's a child of David and Bathsheba, the second child. He's born and he's going to be the ruler of Israel after David dies. And God says, "I'll give you anything that you ask for." And what does Solomon do famously? He says, "I need wisdom. You have a great and mighty people, and I can't do this. I need your wisdom." And so God promises him wisdom as well as fame and riches, all of it together and long life because he asked for wisdom. God rewarded him with everything else as well.

Now, we all know the story of Solomon in his wisdom, especially the baby the two mothers we're fighting about, and he offers to split it in half and give half each mother. A little unconventional maybe but he got to the point. The real mother said, "No, let's keep the baby alive." So he knew. Solomon is considered by scripture, so therefore by God to be the wisest man who has ever lived, past, present, and future. Wise man, completely as far as humans go, understood more than anybody else has ever understood, and yet we're not even completely certain he's going to go to Heaven.

Because with all that wisdom, with all that knowledge and understanding, he allowed himself to be taken away from the worship of God and began to worship other gods based on the number of wives that he had and their gods, he started to worship them. He also began to get very enamored with his own wealth. He'd like to show off his wealth to the Queen of Sheba famously and to others as well, like that was his doing, which of course Jesus makes a point of saying very clearly we don't do it, but we're going to get into that later. So Solomon spends the entire book of Ecclesiastes saying, "Life is a miserable toil."

And then finally, at the very end, he finally says, "But what we need to do is fear God and obey His commands." So he finally at the end gets it right, but he's bitter, he's frustrated, he's hopeless. Why? Because with all of the wisdom of Solomon, he did not take that wisdom and apply it to the worship of God. He took that wisdom

and focused upon himself. He abused the gifts that God gave to him and used it for his own glory, for his own satisfaction, for his own well-being. So all the wisdom in the world cannot save a single soul because no matter how much wisdom you have, no matter how much wealth you have, no matter how much power you have, none of that can defeat the one enemy that we all have, and that is death. You might be able to prolong it for a while, but you're never ever going to be able to stop it. We're all going to die. So what's the point of everything that we do on this Earth?

Well, Jesus makes it very clear. The point is, as does Solomon a little bit, he says, "There's nothing better for a person than that he should eat, 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." And here's where I'd like to look at the Catechism and the Apostles Creed. So look at how Luther defines all three articles of the Apostles Creed on page 222.

So the first article, the Father, what does this mean? "I believe that God has made me and all creatures, that He has given me my body, soul, eyes, ears, all my members, my reason and all my senses, and still takes care of them. He has also given me clothing and shoes, food and drink, house and home, wife and children, land, animals, and all I have. He richly and daily provides me with all that I need to support this body and life. He defends me against all danger and guards and protects me from all evil. All this He does out of fatherly, divine goodness and mercy, without any merit or worthiness within me. For all this, it is my duty to thank and praise, serve and obey."

Look at all of that. God has given us all things. Now, you might argue, wait a second. I bought the clothes that I'm wearing. I bought the shoes that I'm wearing. I chose my home, put out a mortgage for it. I married my wife. I had my children. I take care of my land and animals. But the only way you could do that is if God gave you the wisdom, the strength, and the skill to do it. If He didn't give you wisdom, you wouldn't be able to do it. If He didn't give you strength, you wouldn't be able to do it. In other words, even the money that you earn is a result of the gifts that God has given to you, and therefore He gets the glory. It's not about you, it's about God and the gifts that He has given to you.

Now, the question is how do you then use the gifts that God has given you? That's really the question. How do you view the gifts that God has given to you? Well, the man who asked Jesus to force his brother to share the inheritance was focused upon the material world and his own wealth. It's interesting. Jesus says, "Man, who made me a judge or arbiter over you?" Well, you're God, so you're the judge and arbiter over everything. But what is He saying here? God's not concerned necessarily with the things of this world. If that's your only focus, the things of this

world are given to you so that you might thank and praise, serve and obey Him. Not so that you might hoard it for yourself or be satisfied in what you have.

Now, we've got this description of this man who had this wonderful harvest and he had an overwhelming crop, so he decides to take care of himself, tear down the old storage, put up new ones, and eat, drink, and be happy and have a life of leisure. And it's not that having a large bank account or a nice home or a good crop or anything. It's not like any of that is bad in and of itself. It's your attitude about that stuff that is the problem. See, the man who was asking Jesus to force the brother to give his inheritance was focused upon him himself and his own well-being. And let's face it. Think about anybody, any movie or any story that you heard about a family, a very rich family trying to divide up the inheritance amongst the next generation. That's always a peaceful and joyful time. Families are broken, arguments break out, murder and other things happen. I mean, this is evil stuff. Why? Because they're focused upon themselves and what they want for themselves. Grab everything that you can and hold it for yourself.

The attitude is the problem, not the things themselves. Scripture says that the love of money is the root of all evil. Money in and of itself is a tool, but it's the love of that money that is the problem. In fact, it's the love of anything other than God that becomes the problem. As Paul says in Colossians, "If you have been raised with Christ," again, this is following what we read last week. "You've been raised in Christ, in your baptism. If then you have been raised with Christ, if you've been baptized, seek the things that are above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God." Set your mind on the things that are above, not on the things that are on the earth. See, if we're focused only about the things on the earth, it leads to hatred, malice, anger, jealousy, sexual immorality, impurity, passion, evil desires, covetousness, which is all idolatry. We are putting our place, our hope and our trust and our well-being on something other than God.

Now, God may never call you to sell all that you have and give to the poor and follow Him. That's another section of scripture. He may never call you to do that. However, every single one of us should be willing to do that if He does call us. See, that's the attitude that we are called to have, that do we trust God to take care of us when everything else is stripped away? If we lose our job, if the markets crash and our retirement fund is wiped out, if our home is destroyed in a hurricane, if our health is suddenly diagnosed with massive problems and we have six months to live or two weeks to live or whatever it is, do we still trust God to take care of us when those things happen? Because they could and they often do to people.

But if you think you will not be well if all of that is taken away, then perhaps you have idolized those things. It's not bad to have stuff, to have a bank account, to have a retirement. That's not bad in and of itself. What you think about it and how

you treat it, that's the issue. We are called to be generous with all of our goods so that we might be of service to our neighbor. I mean, even if this guy who had this wonderful harvest had sold the stuff, he would've been taking care of his neighbor. It's not necessarily just given away, but how do you serve even in your job? How do you serve your neighbor in what you do, in how you give and how you use your money? That's the attitude about our stuff is what God is trying to get us to think about because He wants us to focus upon the joy and the hope that He has given to us.

I mean, after all, look at the second article when he talks about Jesus Christ. "I believe that Jesus Christ, true God, begotten to the Father from eternity and also true man born to the Virgin Mary is my Lord, who has redeemed me, a lost and condemned person, purchased and won me from all sin, from death and from the power of the devil. Not with gold or silver, but with His holy, precious blood and with His innocent suffering and death." Why? So that I might be His own and live under Him in His kingdom and serve Him in everlasting righteousness, innocence and blessedness, just as He has risen from the dead, lives and reigns for all eternity. This is most certainly true. He has redeemed us. He has saved us. He has purchased us. He has freed us from the fear of death, that one enemy that nobody else can defeat. He already has defeated. Why? So that He might bring us to live with Him in His kingdom.

You want to talk about riches and opulence and peace and joy and harmony. That's what is waiting for us. A wealth beyond imagination. Of course, the most important wealth is that we can see our God face to face and not be afraid, that we can stand up before the holy and righteous God and not feel His judgment upon us for our sin. How much is that worth? It's worth more than you have. It's worth more than you can give. Even if you gave everything, it's more than you've got, which is of course why Christ came for us because He could pay that price that we could not. And so we put our hope in Christ, not in our stuff.

And then even when we get to the Holy Spirit, it's the same thing. God has done all of this for us. What about the Holy Spirit? "I believe that I cannot by my own reason or strength, believe in Jesus Christ, my Lord, or come to Him, but the Holy Spirit has called me by the gospel, enlightened me with His gifts, sanctified and kept me in the true faith in the same way He calls, gathers and lightens and sanctifies the whole Christian Church on earth and keeps it with Jesus Christ in the one true faith." In this Christian Church, He daily and richly forgives all my sins and the sins of all believers, and on the last day, He will raise me and all the dead and give eternal life to me and all believers in Christ. Again what is it worth that He provides the forgiveness of sins to us? What is it worth that He raises us to eternal life? How much would we pay for that gift?

That's what we need to treasure. That's what keeps us away from sexual immorality, impurity, passion, evil desire, covetousness, and also anger, wrath, slander and obscene talk from your mouth and lying to one another. Why do we do all of those things? Because it's easier for us, it's better for us in the short term. We think we can get away with it. Lots of different reasons. We're jealous, we covet. All of it stems from we're focused on our own selves and not upon God. And God says, "Be willing to forsake everything for the gift that I've given to you," because that's exactly what He did to give us that gift. He forsook everything, equality with the Father, peace and harmony in paradise, in heaven.

Instead, He deigned to be born an infant and go through the suffering and death that we deserved, so that we might receive the eternal life and the resurrection, which He earned for us. So it's not the stuff that you have. It's your attitude about the stuff that God is trying to get us to think about. Nothing can separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus, our Lord except our own willful desire to walk away from Him and put our trust in something else. Trust him. He will never forsake you. He will never leave you. Even if everything is wiped out, including your life itself, you're still not forsaken, and that is worth everything. May His grace and His mercy and His peace be in abide with you always now and forever more unto life everlasting, amen.