

Ecclesiastes 5:8-20

Pentecost 19, Supplement Series C, September 25, 2016

Theme: Grievous evil and a solid realization

INJ Solomon was the King of Israel. God gave him insight and understanding beyond everyone else. He was rich, he was wise, he was compassionate and kind. Solomon investigated science and history and economics and all of life's intricacies. This book, Ecclesiastes, is his summary statement. He helps us make sense of the things we see "under the sun." The main point is that trusting the LORD is true wisdom.

Solomon's teaching pattern is much like that of a folk story. Do you remember the story of Chicken Little? Mr. Little was minding his own business in the barnyard when an acorn fell on his head. Chicken Little became convinced that the sky was falling. He ran around the farm raising awareness and working everyone into a tizzy.

"The sky is falling!" Isn't that the message we hear in every corner of life? Listen to the news: Earthquakes. Pollution. Poverty. It is so bad out there! Drug cartels and human trafficking. Riots. Violence. Did you hear what the presidential candidates did? Like Chicken Little, we get agitated. "How can I be happy, how can life be good when these things happen?"

In our agitation we are easily manipulated and taken advantage of. Do you remember what happened to Chicken Little and his worked-up friends? They were so distracted by thinking the sky was falling that they didn't pay attention to Foxy-Loxy, who fueled their frenzy. Then the fox ate them all for dinner.

Solomon gives us a better resolution to the mysteries of life than, "They all died." In the words of Ecclesiastes he shows us that grievous evils are all around, yet he leads us to this solid realization: God our Savior gives us life and contentment. Walk with me through these verses and rejoice in the great blessings our God gives.

Wise Solomon looks at the sinful world, and sees the evils that thrive in it. His view is strikingly current. Look at the way the poor are treated. They have limited opportunity. They don't get a fair shake. Even when they try, those more powerful make things difficult. The justice system seems rigged against them, and rights are denied. Remember that Solomon was looking at life nearly 3,000 years ago, not last week in Charlotte!

The civil rights movement, for all the progress it made a generation ago, did not end the oppression of poor or minorities in America - or anywhere else in the world. Social forces have become violent in reaction to

perceived mistreatments. Some people seek to make their own justice. You see the mayhem spilling into the streets and the vitriol spewed online. Did you hear what Solomon said? "Do not be surprised at such things."

Yes, it is a grievous evil when people are unfairly treated. When the system of courts does not function to preserve what is right, misery abounds. Yet recognize that grievous evil such as this is new to our day and age. It has gone on since sin entered the world. Don't be a part of the problem, of course, but also don't be surprised that sin happens!

Another grievous evil is the interference of government. Solomon identifies it by saying that one official is eyed by a higher one, and over them both is one still higher. They all take from the land for their sustenance. Even the king (That is Solomon, the author!) gets a cut of taxes. We often think of politics negatively. It hands down heavy rules and regulations, and intrudes in places it ought not. Don't be surprised at what you see, because governments often behave this way. It isn't good. It isn't right. But grievous evils occur in a sinful world.

Greed is another way sin erodes our lives. Isn't it a truism when Solomon says, "Whoever loves money never has money enough"? All that seeking after wealth. Don't you want more? Chasing it, cutting corners to get it, being protective to keep it, wanting to use it in the best way possible, investing, saving, taking chances, being safe. You never have enough to end the cycle, do you? "This, too, is meaningless."

"Meaningless" is the term Solomon uses to remind us that what we see and what we can hold and what we pursue apart from God has no lasting value. We sometimes call it the rat race. Everything "under the sun" in our world seems pointless, empty, vain. When we see these great evils, we wonder where God is. What is he doing? Why he isn't changing things for the better? A person could even accuse God of not caring!

Look at the emptiness of our commercialism. We pursue the newest and the latest and the shiniest. Yet, we never find happiness - someone else always has more than I do. Those "someone else's" sometimes cross our awareness as a warning. Scrooge-type people hoard wealth, but never use it for their enjoyment or for the good of others. Some, who had much, lost it in a natural disaster or in an economic crash. What good does it do to invest and save when it can disappear in an instant? Life seems meaningless!

The media has no end of sad stories of people who have lost their livelihood. Perhaps it was foolish choices. Or a dishonest relative. Or the inescapable cycle of addiction. Or the faceless pressure from "progress." Unethical people take advantage of the unsuspecting. Wealth is lost. Generations suffer. Why do we have so much evil in the world?

When we look at our own lives, we can color it darkly. "I don't have enough. I don't have options. What can I do to change anything? Even when I tried, it fell to pieces." Our frustration can turn into an accusation against God. "If God were paying attention he would do something for me." Do you shake your fist at him? Are you angry that God gave you such a miserable life? Such grievous evil!

Solomon starts to lead us in the direction of hopelessness. Life is meaningless. Sadness and sorrow are the only existence we can expect. Don't look for a bright spot, because it will soon turn dark again. Poor us! Never will anything be worthwhile. Meaningless!

Does the reality of grievous evil immobilize you? Or, like Chicken Little, does it agitate you? We ought to fix it! End oppression. Take wealth away from the powerful. Give money to the poor. We run around the barnyard trying to be relevant. We sign up for a cause. "Look twice, motorcyclists are everywhere." "I recycled and saved the planet." "I gave water to Flint to help people in need." Those are all good things to be involved in, but does the grievous evil go away? This, too, is meaningless.

Meaningless – if we miss Solomon's point. Don't get so involved with good causes that you don't notice the real and present danger that looms: Foxy Loxy is preparing his dinner! Scripture calls Satan a roaring lion, looking to devour us. The real problem to recognize in all the grievous evil that fills the earth is that sin has corrupted everyone and everything. When we see grievous evil, it ought remind us of the curse of our own sin and the condemnation we deserve because of it.

What we need is not just kindness or cash or common sense. We need a Savior! God has provided that Savior by sending his Son into the flesh. He rescued from evil and gives heaven. Don't be confused by the chaos sin has wrought, but stand on the solid ground of God's grace in Christ. Come to the solid realization that God gives us what we need.

He gave his Son to rescue us from all the evil that surrounds us. And all the evil that dwells within us. And all the evil that we don't even realize is there. Jesus entered this cesspool of sin to stand in our place. He endured every temptation and suffered every disgrace. He was mistreated and despised. He did not get justice from Pontius Pilate. Jesus never had wealth or security. Every day was a struggle to get through the darkness.

He did it for you. He bore all the burden of sin, all the curse of death, all the agony of hell, for you. Not only did he endure it, but he defeated it. By his death on the cross, Jesus crushed Satan's head. Death did not win, for Jesus rose on the third day. Instead of being consumed by grievous evil, set your eyes on your Savior! He turns all of life around.

Because Jesus paid the price for sin, now sin does not have power over you any longer. Turn away from it. Repent of it. Forgive those who sinned against you. Jesus forgives you. Stop focusing on the grievous evil, and look at Jesus. His cross is the answer to all that evil: the cross – which looks just like another example of senseless violence and debilitating loss. The cross is your victory because there God himself gives you life.

What about the evil that we see? Remember the Gospel today, where the rich man had every convenience while Lazarus had sores and hunger every day? Jesus didn't call us to social manipulation. He calls us to trust his promises. Jesus is the Way out of the evils of life. In the presence of the LORD there are no tears or sorrow or pain. Our reading today from Revelation proclaimed that the crown of life is yours despite the poverty of life. "Be faithful, even to the point of death." Whatever the grievous evil, God gives meaning to your life in Christ Jesus.

Not only did God give you spiritual life and a Savior, he gives you the things that fill your minutes and days, the things you store in the garage and the basement, and the things you use, the people you love, and the abilities you have. God gives you an abundance of gifts, and they are gifts from him. Use them as precious things – as a means to give thanks to God who gives all things.

Look at it this way: Your car isn't just an aging, unreliable vehicle. It is the transportation God gave so you can work and travel and play. It isn't just a frustrating job, but a way to provide for your family and to use your abilities. God has enabled you to enjoy life, to sleep tired at the end of the day, to run ragged between all the good pressures on your time. These are his gifts to you. Hasn't he been generous?

Take inventory of God's blessings to you. Think of how much he has given. Don't forget the blessing of St. Luke's: Here we worship and have Bible Class and Sunday School and the Lutheran School. You have friends who encourage you in the faith. This is a family that loves you by pointing you to Jesus. Even though grievous evil touches your life, you have forgiveness of sin and an eternal home. Solomon says to find satisfaction in what God gives you. Praise and worship and thank your saving God!

Chicken Little, don't be worked up at the grievous evils you see! Satan uses them to set a trap for your soul. Solomon's solid realization brings calm: Your life is blessed by God even if acorns fall on your head. Work at the toilsome labor God has given you. Sleep well after your hard work. Be happy that God has been so good to you for the few days of life. Life is not meaningless. Jesus fills you with gladness of heart, for you have the crown of life in his name. SDG Amen.