

Psalm 24:1-6

Joyful Generosity Week 1, September 10, 2017

Theme: The earth is the LORD's
I. He is our Creator
II. He is our Redeemer

INJ Materialism is the sin of worshiping the things that fill our lives rather than the Creator who gave us life. While I don't think any of us would be willing to stand up and defend materialism, I know that each of us struggles to combat it. Perhaps a story helps illustrate the problem.

Paul Wendland, now the president of Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary, spent his vicar year in Zambia, Africa, where his father was a missionary. In a letter to a friend and fellow pastor, he told how three students in their seminary had to be dismissed because they were involved in a witchcraft scandal. One of the student's children had died unexpectedly, so he and his friend accused a third student of putting a spell on this child. The two students who made the accusation were dismissed from school – as well as the one who was accused, because his reputation had been damaged beyond repair. The friend wrote back to Pastor Wendland and asked how students who were already at the seminary could still believe in witchcraft. Wendland replied that witchcraft was so much part of the African culture that it was hard to get it out of their heads and hearts.

On another occasion Pastor Wendland shared, "If students from the seminary in Africa were to visit our seminary in Wisconsin, and if they would see all the new cars in the parking lot and hear the students complaining about the food in the cafeteria, they would think that we are the most godless and thankless Christians they had ever met."

We have to admit that we often behave like thankless and godless people. Materialism infects us. We fall for the lie that the stuff that fills our lives can bring us lasting joy and happiness. We accept the deception that these earthly treasures and pleasures will not disappoint us. We fail to put everything into thankful service to God. We think that we never have enough when we have more than we need. The worst part about it is — like witchcraft in Africa — materialism is so much part of our experience that we don't even know we are doing it!

This morning we consider Psalm 24, which reminds us that God is our Creator, and he is our Redeemer. Our response to his goodness is something we will call Joyful Generosity. Joyful Generosity begins with a heart that worships the God who made us.

Psalm 24 makes a bold statement. "The earth is the LORD's, and everything that fills it, the world, and all who live in it." Everything belongs to God, because he made it all. We belong to God, because he made us. Our congregation belongs to God, because he made it. Hurricanes and natural disasters belong to him, too. Our houses, our cars, and the priceless collections of things we treasure belong to God, because the earth and everything that fills it belong to the LORD.

The earth is the LORD's. A simple statement, but a hard truth. Whether the culprit is our sinful nature or our secular culture, we like to think that the earth is ours. When we see destruction, we wonder if we made it happen, if we can stop it, if we can fix it. Imagining the loss of our possessions in a hurricane is hard to consider, but it exposes our tendency to worship what is created instead of the Creator. That's materialism.

The Psalm continues. "Who may go up to the mountain of the LORD? Who may stand in his holy place? He who has clean hands and a pure heart, whose soul is not set on what is false." We should not set our souls, or our hearts, on what is false. That sounds easy, but there is another hard truth. The truth of God is his promise to save sinners. The truth of God is his singular and undeserved love revealed in the Bible. It is false to give created things the attention due only the Creator. It is false to ignore his words and consume our lives with anything less important.

In the book of Ecclesiastes, Solomon describes these less important things as "meaningless" and applies the word to lots of good things that people do. Everything is meaningless when it is compared to the one important thing that Solomon says is to "Fear God and keep his commandments." We would specifically say that trusting the LORD's saving promises is the one thing that matters for an eternity in heaven.

But it is hard to remember that created things are less important. Solomon knew a lot about inconsequential things. He was a builder — a great architect who built the temple. He also built a palace for himself. Another one for his wife, the Pharaoh's daughter. He built storehouses. He built cities. He built stables for all his fine horses and chariots. Solomon loved to build things. So do we, right? We like to make things, whether it is a house, or a garden, or a career, or a family adventure. But Solomon said these were "meaningless" things — inconsequential, less important things.

Solomon was known as the wisest man on earth. He studied. He was a master of economics and biology and architecture and earth sciences. But in the end, he said these, too, were meaningless. Pursuing knowledge and wisdom is not bad. It's just not the most important thing.

He was a rich man. He had an annual income of 666 talents of

gold, or perhaps \$42 billion. He had everything money could buy, and he spared himself no delight or pleasure. He had success above all other kings in the world at the time. But what does he say? It is all meaningless.

When we set our souls on what is false, on those meaningless things, we are idolaters. It is idolatry because God comes in a distant second. It's idolatry because we can't find time for our prayers or our worship. It's idolatry because we aren't aware of our Creator, who is most important. "The earth is the LORD's, and everything that fills it."

The pursuit of personal pleasure presses us hard, doesn't it? Our garage is so full that our cars don't fit. The pole barn is overflowing, too. How much is stored in your basement, your attic, wherever? Will you confess with Solomon what is meaningless and what means most?

The Almighty Creator God knows the difference. He gives us good things as blessings to use for his glory and for the good of those around us. Though we misuse the gifts and deserve eternal punishment for our sin, he reveals himself as more than Creator. He also shows us that he is our Redeemer. His undeserved love for us inspires our Joyful Generosity.

We picture God as up. If we wanted to climb up to meet him, how would we get there? In the Old Testament, the LORD revealed himself in the temple at Jerusalem. There, on the mountain called Zion, was the Holy God! In that place, behind the curtain and in the Holy of Holies, dwelt the Lord of Hosts – with all his power and purity and glorious divinity!

Would you go there? Or would you fear being vaporized by the white hot anger of the God who you have failed to worship above all these meaningless things? Yet the whole point of the Temple and the worship God instituted is to show that there is a way to approach God. Not with our measly gifts or inadequate actions, but trusting his mercy. Listen for the promise God makes to you: "Who may go up to the mountain of the LORD? Who may stand in his holy place? He who has clean hands and a pure heart, whose soul is not set on what is false, who does not swear deceitfully. He will receive blessing from the LORD and righteousness from the God who saves him."

How can you receive blessing and righteousness from God? You have to have clean hands and a pure heart. You have to set your soul on God's truth always, and let your mouth only speak what is right and good. You have to be pure and perfect just like God is, in order to stand before him and receive his blessing. In that setting, none of the meaningless things the LORD created will alter the just judgment of his condemnation.

Only one thing matters. The God who saves you has accomplished everything necessary for you to approach him. The earth is the LORD's,

and he is your Redeemer. The holy and pure mighty God determined to enter the world he created. The Second Person of the Trinity took on human flesh and humbled himself to be born of a virgin. Jesus put himself under the law and he obeyed it completely for you. He is righteousness and purity and holiness – your substitute.

He clothes you in his righteousness. He declares you to be pure. He washes you clean of every stain and all guilt. The LORD your Redeemer has given you a blessing you don't deserve and couldn't buy and cannot achieve. You have received it in Holy Baptism. You are reminded of it every time you worship. Your Redeemer invites you to draw near to him!

Not only did Jesus supply your righteousness, he also took away your sin. Every idolatrous moment you have ever had was nailed to the cross. Jesus' holy blood was shed to pay for each time you let the less important intrude on the most important. For every meaningless that became too meaningful, Jesus died. He suffered the anguish of the Father's forsaken-ness for you. The depths of Hell he endured for you. The God who saves you declares you not guilty!

Your Redeemer, the LORD, has forgiven you in Christ Jesus. He has come to dwell in your heart by faith. He is powerfully molding and shaping you and your faith and your life by his words. Who may go up to the mountain of the LORD? You may. Who may stand in his holy place? You have clean hands and a pure heart. Your soul has not been set on what is false. You do not swear deceitfully. Because you are covered in Christ's righteousness. You have received blessing from the LORD! The God who saves is your Redeemer.

Doesn't the LORD's promise make you joyful? Isn't it exciting to know that God has drawn near to you? Doesn't it free you to Joyful Generosity when you recognize that "the earth is the LORD's and everything that fills it"? How you use the less important stuff of life is a reflection of your trust in the LORD. He gives the most important thing for eternity. If a hurricane came and wiped out every single thing you owned, you still have a living Savior. You still stand forgiven. Heaven is secure. The Word endures forever. What is most important cannot be taken from you!

The lesson is not just about using our money. And it isn't just about what happens in our congregation. The earth is the LORD's. The things God gives us are tools to make known that we trust him for our salvation. Come up to the mountain of the LORD and rejoice in the proclamation that you have clean hands and a pure heart in your Savior Jesus. Come before the LORD confessing that he is your Creator and your Redeemer. Everything after that is Joyful Generosity! SDG Amen.