

Sermon by Deacon Hughes: Real Life Is Found Among God's Holy People, Where Heaven and Earth Connect. That Is Where Our Lives Are Full of Possibility, Expectation and Delight.

If you came to church this morning anticipating encouragement and good news, it is not unlikely that some of you are a little bummed out after the lectionary readings. On a glorious Sunday morning, when life is good and all is well with the world, is it really necessary to be reminded that all is vanity, all is just a mist? The Psalm wasn't much better. The Epistle emphasized our Christian duty to one another and the Gospel left us wondering about our own barns. Yes, Virginia, it is necessary, from time to time, to be reminded that life is like a mist that evaporates with the sunrise.

We are familiar enough with the book of Ecclesiastes to identify it immediately when we hear the words, "*Vanity of vanities . . . ! All is vanity*" or, as it was phrased this morning, "*Everything is meaningless, . . . utterly meaningless.*" Our English translations suggest this emptiness and futility of everything. But the Hebrew word (*hebel*) means something more like the steam that rises from your warm shower or, as just stated, like the mist that evaporates with the sunrise. Someone else explains this well. I quote, "Understood in this sense, Ecclesiastes begins with a plain statement of fact, that a human life is nothing more than a breath. The book of Ecclesiastes looks at life on the terms that life offers: that is, a brief interval full of possible delight and pleasure, but one in which most human pretensions to worth, grandeur, and importance are (*hebel*), a fleeting mist that passes with the dawn. On its own terms, Ecclesiastes is one of the most devout books in the Hebrew Bible. It accepts the endurance of God and of the created order, and invites its reader to affirm the value of life as it is and not to hunt around for spurious consolations, that is, false comforts."

However, what Ecclesiastes does not do is "take refuge in a

belief that this brief life will lead to something better or more enduring after death." We have now come full circle. We are back to chasing the wind.

Sir Edwin Hoskyns, an early twentieth century Anglican biblical scholar and theologian, helps us here. He maintained that Ecclesiastes "is the most Christian book in the Old Testament! If taken really seriously, it prepares the way for a hearing of the gospel of Jesus. Ecclesiastes is not so much Good News as it is the bad news that has to be heard before the Good News becomes audible."

Let's turn our attention now to the morning's Gospel. On a day following Jesus' teaching on prayer, we find Jesus in hot debate with the crowds and the experts of the law. He has taken a private moment with his disciples when a voice from the crowd interrupts. "*Teacher, please tell my brother to divide our father's estate with me.*" And here we have the story of the "Rich Fool and His Barns." In preparation for his retirement, the fool has accumulated so much wealth that he must build bigger and bigger barns. The catch is—his life is required of him that very night. He has lived his life as unto himself with no reference to the God on which it depended. Jesus warns the inquirer, "*Beware! Don't be greedy for what you do not have. Real life is not measured by how much we own. . . a person is a fool to store up earthly wealth but not have a rich relationship with God.*"

We read this morning in Paul's letter to the Colossians something about 'real life.' We find 'real life' among God's holy people—those whom he loves. They clothe themselves with tenderhearted mercy, kindness, humility, gentleness, and patience. They forgive each other and clothe themselves in love. Peace flows from (p.2→)

Editor: Box 972, Boise, ID 83701. 208-336-3951, harbingermail@aol.com

Pastor: The Rev. Dr. Brook Thelander, epworthrector@msn.com

On the Web: www.epworthchapelonthegreen.org

Sundays
10:00 a.m.: Word & Table service
11:30 a.m.: Refreshments, conversation
11:45 a.m.: Post-service discussion

6:00-8:00 p.m. This Sunday: Sixth Annual Ice Cream Social

Thursdays: 5:30 p.m.: Evening Prayers. 6:00 p.m.: Singing & discussing hymns.

Readings, 8/12: Gen. 15:1-6; Ps. 33:12-15, 18-22; Heb. 11:1-16; Luke 12:32-40. **8/19:** Jer. 23:23-29; Ps. 82; Heb. 12:1-14; Luke 12:49-56.

Prayer Emphases: Estonia; The Episcopal Church; All Saints Episcopal Church, Winter Park, FL, and the Rev. Dr. Robert Lord, Rector; Convoy of Hope; parishioners on Liberty Road.

(**Sermon, cont'd.**) them as Jesus rules their hearts. They live in peace. His words instruct them and make them wise. They counsel one another and sing songs. And, they are always thankful. Therefore, their lives are full of possibility, expectation and delight. This is where heaven and earth connect. Where God's will is not only done in heaven but here on earth as well.

Friends, 'real life' is not misty or elusive. Real life is grounded, grounded in the knowledge and faith taught us by our Lord Jesus Christ and the scriptures. It is hard work from time to time—a pay check to bring home, a meal to get on the table, a child to help with his homework, a neighbor needing a sympathetic ear, a sister struggling with cancer, a relationship to mend, the list goes on, and tomorrow little may have changed. But there are joy and meaning in the doing when one is clothed with love, patience, kindness and gentleness.

If Ecclesiastes has done its job this morning, we have been reminded that life is fleeting and transient and a life without God is meaningless. It has emphasized the bad news so we may more fully embrace the good news. There is 'real life' for each of us, and it is sustained through the Word and communion with one another at the Lord's Table.

The Harbinger will not publish next week.