



The Word...

Vanity of vanities, says Qohelet. All things are vanity! ...
For what profit comes to man from all the toil and anxiety of heart
with which he has labored under the sun? All his days sorrow and grief are his
occupation; even at night his mind is not at rest.

(Ecc 1:2, 2:21-23)

“A rich man had a bountiful harvest. ‘What shall I do, I do not have space to
store my harvest?’ ...I shall build larger barns to store all my grain and I shall
say, “Now as for you, you have so many good things stored up for many
years, rest, eat, drink, be merry!”

(Lk 12: 13-22 adapted)

Pondering the Word ...

Have you seen the images from the new Webb telescope? If not, take a minute to log onto to
<https://webbtelescope.org/news/first-images/gallery> and feast your eyes on the sheer majesty of God’s creation!

These images call to mind today’s words from Qohelet who is considered to be “a radical philosopher
articulating...a powerful dissent from the mainline Wisdom” (Robert Alter, *The Hebrew Bible: The Writings*,
p.673). In the Hebrew, all is “*mere breath*.” All our maneuverings and intrigues don’t matter in the least; all our
ego battles and hoarding of things to prepare for a future that, as we hear in today’s gospel, could disappear
into the ether overnight. We are but the tiniest of specks among innumerable tiny specks.

Some may read the Book of Ecclesiastes as a discourse on the futility of life and labors; indeed, the passage from
today sure sounds like that. Some see it as an admonition that we are *supposed* to be suffering in this life,
denying ourselves good things and joy. But I always like to include the verses that directly follow: “*There is
nothing better for a person than to eat and drink and provide themselves with good things by their labors. Even this I realized
is from the hand of God. For who can eat or drink apart from God?*” (2:24-25)

I think Qohelet’s message is this: “Get over yourselves! It’s not all about you. Look up into the heavens in awe
and amazement before the God who knows every hair on your head, who has your name written on the palm of
his hand. Let God be God in your life, share your bounty, and enjoy the gifts of your loving Creator.”

Living the Word...

Parable Revisited: “A rich man had a bountiful harvest. ‘What shall I do, I do not have space to store my
harvest?’ This is what I shall do: I’ll keep what I need for my family and go into the countryside and towns
giving my bounty to the poor, and then I shall say to myself, now as for you, you have been blessed with God’s
abundance. Eat, drink, be merry! The Lord has shared his goodness through you.’ And God said to him, ‘Oh
wise and generous one. Soon you will join me to partake of the harvest that never ends. The things you have
shared with others will nourish their bodies and souls, and your name will be written upon their hearts.’”

Personal Reflections and Ideas ...

Mon, Aug 1: *“From of old, prophets who were before you and me prophesied war, woe, and pestilence...But the prophet who prophesies peace is recognized as truly sent by the LORD when his prophetic prediction is fulfilled.”* (Jer 28:1-17)
We don't like to hear bad news. We'd rather listen to someone say, “The virus will just disappear by summer” rather than to hear dire warnings of a prolonged pandemic. Or the global warming deniers who claim the heat and droughts we are experiencing worldwide are just a fluke of nature rather than a reality of our abuse of the earth. While their job was a thankless one, the OT prophets were always proven true. Humanity hasn't changed much. **Reflection/ Provision:** Like Jeremiah, we can hope and pray the rosy prophecies of false prophets come to pass, but do we allow ourselves to be deluded by them? That we don't need to change our ways in order for peace and good to reign? Spend time today reflecting on the realities you are tempted to deny. Or, if you are one who internalizes dire predictions, do something positive for someone who has suffered due to falsehoods.

Tue, Aug 2: *For thus says the LORD: “Incurable is your wound, grievous your bruise...(but) I will restore the tents of Jacob, his dwellings I will pity...You shall be my people, and I will be your God.”* (Jer 30:1-2, 12-15, 18-22)
Just prior to this passage in Chapter 29, God, through Jeremiah, says to the Israelites, “Look, you're going to be stuck in Babylon for 70 years, so you might as well make the best of it. Get married. Have kids. Don't worry. I am looking out for you to give the children a future of hope. BUT you need to stop listening to these false prophets who 'dream dreams' and promise things to win your affections (read: votes). Start listening to the true prophets who speak of *metanoia* and of my mercy.” **Reflection/Provision:** False prophets spin tales of conspiracy theories and magical cures. True prophets speak of God's mercy as we return with hard-earned wisdom and contrite hearts. Taking an easy or deceptive way results in a heavier load, “an iron yoke instead of a wooden one.” If you are carrying a burden from past mistakes, don't make it heavier by continuing in the wrong direction. Return to God who will lighten your load. It takes work but is oh so worth it!

Wed, Aug 3: *A Canaanite woman called out, “Have pity on me, Lord, Son of David! My daughter is tormented by a demon.”...His disciples asked him, “Send her away, for she keeps calling out after us.”* (Mt 15:21-29)
Reflection/ Provision: Who are the “Canaanites” in your life right now? Friends that keep harping on some controversial topic? Relatives the kids just wish you would send away? That woman who is always on the street corner or road median begging for money? That tattooed transgender person who insists on continuing to come to church? The Canaanite woman calls Jesus forward to see his ministry, not just to the Jews, but to the whole world. How might those you deem as less worthy—dare I say, “dogs”—be calling you forward?

Thu, Aug 4: *“I will place my law within them, and write it upon their hearts.”* (Jer 31: 31-34)
“The Law” is the first five books of the OT, also known as the Five Books of Moses or the Pentateuch. It's a lot for God to write on our hearts! Thankfully, Jesus simplified it for us: *“Love your God with all your heart, soul, and mind, and love your neighbor as yourself.”* **Reflection/Provision:** There are three loves in this verse: love God, love neighbor, love self. I know lots of people who find that last one to be difficult. To view ourselves as lovable, not in spite of our imperfections but because of them—that's how God loves us. Love yourself that way too!

Fri, Aug 5: *“Whoever wishes to come after me must deny himself, take up his cross, and follow me.”* (Mt 16:24-28)
Reflection/Provision: What does denying yourself look like for you? What is your cross? Some take this to mean worldly comforts and material things, similar to Jesus' call to the rich young man. But I don't think it's that simple. Yes, in our society, our egos tend to be tied up in fame or wealth or recognition, but what if denying yourself means resisting the urge to judge others or to complain? What if a cross is a parent refusing to live through their children, letting their kids succeed or fail on their own? The answer to these questions has to do with our idols, our false gods. If you are not sure what those idols are, ask the Spirit to enlighten you.

Sat, Aug 6: *“I saw one like a Son of man coming, on the clouds of heaven.”* (Dn 7: 9-10, 13-14)
Reflection/Provision: As a bookend prayer for this week, use a slide show of the images from the Webb telescope as an experience of “Visio Divina”—Divine Seeing. Read the passage from Daniel or Psalm 97. Allow yourself to be swept away from all the trials and tribulations—the insignificance of all we worry about—and allow the majesty of God to fill you with Divine love and wonder!