

## 10.02.22 – Pentecost 17 & Communion

### “Christ Makes Us Extraordinary”

The United Baptist Church, Annandale, VA

#### **Ecclesiastes 2:4-11; 5:18-20 (GNT) ~ Pam**

<sup>2</sup> <sup>4</sup> I accomplished great things. I built myself houses and planted vineyards. <sup>5</sup> I planted gardens and orchards, with all kinds of fruit trees in them; <sup>6</sup> I dug ponds to irrigate them. <sup>7</sup> I bought many slaves, and there were slaves born in my household. I owned more livestock than anyone else who had ever lived in Jerusalem. <sup>8</sup> I also piled up silver and gold from the royal treasuries of the lands I ruled. Men and women sang to entertain me, and I had all the women a man could want.

<sup>9</sup> Yes, I was great, greater than anyone else who had ever lived in Jerusalem, and my wisdom never failed me. <sup>10</sup> Anything I wanted, I got. I did not deny myself any pleasure. I was proud of everything I had worked for, and all this was my reward. <sup>11</sup> Then I thought about all that I had done and how hard I had worked doing it, and I realized that it didn't mean a thing. It was like chasing the wind—of no use at all.

<sup>5</sup> <sup>18</sup> Here is what I have found out: the best thing we can do is eat and drink and enjoy what we have worked for during the short life that God has given us; this is our fate. <sup>19</sup> If God gives us wealth and property and lets us enjoy them, we should be grateful and enjoy what we have worked for. It is a gift from God. <sup>20</sup> Since God has allowed us to be happy, we will not worry too much about how short life is.

**L: These are the Warning Words of King Solomon. All: Thanks be to God!**

#### **Ephesians 2:1-10 (NKJV)**

<sup>1</sup> And you *He made alive*, who were dead in trespasses and sins, <sup>2</sup> in which you once walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit who now works in the sons of disobedience, <sup>3</sup> among whom also we all once conducted ourselves in the lusts of our flesh, fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, just as the others.

<sup>4</sup> But God, who is rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us, <sup>5</sup> even when we were dead in trespasses, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved), <sup>6</sup> and raised *us* up together, and made *us* sit together in the heavenly *places* in Christ Jesus, <sup>7</sup> that in the ages to come He might show the exceeding riches of His grace in *His* kindness toward us in Christ Jesus. <sup>8</sup> For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; *it is* the gift of God, <sup>9</sup> not of works, lest anyone should boast. <sup>10</sup> For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them.

**Leader: These are Testimonial Words of Paul. All: Thanks be to God!**

#### **Please pray with me:**

Creator God, we thank you for our rich Bible history and its men and women of faith. We thank you for a new way to look at the ordinary things of life, the bounty and the lean, so we may observe you in a more extraordinary way. We are grateful

to be together in worship; be with those who could not be here today. Open our minds and hearts now as we seek the extraordinary in the ordinary. Speak through this messenger and your words. Amen.

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We pray for all those in Florida who lost loved ones and property, and don't have a home or church building to go to for worship this morning. Hurricanes in the fall remind us that the seasons are changing. There will be warmer days to come before the heat goes on in a few weeks, so please wear layers and use the blankets and shawls as needed.

Thank you for praying last week's unique benediction of gratitude and blessing for our tree. It was removed Monday, all except the stump which will be ground down this week. I can say it was a bit sad to see it go, but there **was** rot in the center branches. The process was fascinating and very safe. The company we chose has the only large crane with both a chain saw and claws to lower the branches. Thank you for your prayers and to Elmer, Bill, Berniece, Antonio, and Roudaina for joining me to witness the removal. I have photos I will put on the bulletin board soon.

Last Sunday we read about the building of the temple and palace, and this week's readings are assumed to be written by the same Solomon or someone very close to him. Ecclesiastes is a challenging book not often studied and is considered wisdom literature. We are familiar with a few of its phrases like "to everything there is a season", and "all is vanity." One of the challenges is the author. Pre-enlightenment, the traditional view was that it was Solomon; then after Biblical textual criticism came into fashion, scholars disputed author because of linguistics chronology. More recently the commentaries have returned to the traditional view that Solomon or someone very close to him wrote the verses.

So, I will be using Solomon as the author, who seems to be having an internal argument with himself (and maybe God) about all his work and accomplishments. Rather than see the extraordinary work he accomplished, he feels the futility of human endeavor. Strange, since he had employed over 10,000 men to design and complete grand building projects. You would think he would be proud; at the beginning he was. He was a striver; early on his joy came from achievement; he had vineyards, parks, gardens, herds, large flocks, silver, gold, slaves, a large family, and a harem of women to serve him. All that, upon reflection, at this point in his life, did not please him; stuff felt meaningless. Or perhaps, as many humans feel at some time in their lives, he was having an existential crisis—pondering his own **purpose and motivations** in life. He was not happy.

Solomon was in reflective prayer to God, asking what is the point of toiling? To compete with other men? Or was work just a vehicle to accumulate riches and things, or was it to appreciate the gifts of beauty God provides? He was wondering what would be said of his life at the end. Chapters 2-5 are his trying to work that out, and by verses 5:18-20, he concludes that **all** came from God (the ordinary **and** the extraordinary), so he should be grateful. Isn't that what we saw in Second Chronicles a few weeks ago when God blessed his temple building efforts, consumed the sacrifice, and declared it a house of prayer if Solomon and his people obeyed his statutes?

At the beginning of our reading, he lists all he has accomplished to praise God, one would hope, but no, he *whines* about it as he wrestles with his life's purpose. I do not judge this writing; it feels as if we are

reading private journals. I went through a similar process before I accepted God's calling into the ministry. Solomon's striving and acquisition were insults to God's benevolence. But note this! Solomon moves out of that arrogant sin of being ungrateful to recall his covenant with God and God's love of him shown through the rewards of his life on earth. He is brought to his knees in **humility**, recognizing he did it all through God's grace and has reward because of his love of God and God's gracious gifts toward him. He finally realizes he has everything, even ordinary life, **only** because God deemed it so. We too have everything we need because of God's grace through Jesus Christ. We praise those ordinary and extraordinary gifts with our gratitude.

Paul experienced a similar transformation and writes to the Ephesians calling out their sin and worldly ways. The unsaved follow Satan consciously and in opposition to God. Paul reminds them and us that even we who are transformed had our time of sin before we met God personally and must still confess human frailty at times. Romans 6:23 <sup>ESV</sup> tells us “<sup>23</sup> For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.” By grace we have been saved, not by our own merits, but because God so loved the world, he gave his only Son, Jesus, to die on the cross, accepting all our sin in atonement. Faith is our salvation; it is not hard work, rather surrender. The crucifixion itself for the Jews of Jesus' time was ordinary punishment for criminals. What was extraordinary was Christ's forgiveness of his punishers and His Resurrection. The apostle Paul reminds the Ephesians that religion may feel ordinary in the rules and the work to help others, but God's grace is extraordinary and cannot be easily explained. Paul had to be knocked off

his feet and blinded to realize that Jesus' forgiveness and salvation were real!

Like Solomon finally understanding grace and all of life's rewards are gifts from God, Paul was teaching that this grace and our faith are all gifts of Jesus, who was God's ultimate gift for us. Wages are earned from human effort, true, but the gift of having a job, retirement funds, and even having **eternal life** are all free gifts of God's amazing grace. New life and resurrection in Christ are promised; and that is what we celebrate through the Lord's Supper. We remember Christ's sacrifice monthly through the breaking of bread and sharing juice. We remember our covenant with God, Christ, the Holy Spirit, and each other quarterly as we read today, so we appreciate and show gratitude for the gifts we have and are given.

As we worship this season until the end of 2022, please let us continue to listen for the work God is providing us to do, knowing that through our faith, the fruit of works will be shown to others as a testimony of God's grace. Are we still listening for God's direction? As you go about the ordinary ways of life and utilize prayer tools, please watch for the extraordinary, make a note of it, and if called by God to act, do so with gratitude and humility to serve. Amen! //

**Will you pray with me?** Lord, thank you for this reminder of your gifts here on earth. Let us listen for your direction so we are not waiting around for the grace of eternity. Let us recognize the grace right here, right now among your people, both believers and non-believers. Help us to share our stories with those who need to meet you face to face. May we be humble enough to receive the gifts you share. In Jesus' name we pray, **Amen.**