**Good Shepherd Lutheran Church**

**Watertown, WI**

**“Durable Goods”**

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Palm Sunday, 2024

“*So I hated life, because the work that is done under the sun was grievous to me. All of it is meaningless, a chasing after the wind.* *I hated all the things I had toiled for under the sun, because I must leave them to the one who comes after me. And who knows whether he will be a wise man or a fool? Yet he will have control over all the work into which I have poured my effort and skill under the sun. This too is meaningless. So my heart began to despair over all my toilsome labor under the sun. For a man may do his work with wisdom, knowledge and skill, and then he must leave all he owns to someone who has not worked for it. This too is meaningless and a great misfortune. What does a man get for all the toil and anxious striving with which he labors under the sun? All his days his work is pain and grief; even at night his mind does not rest. This too is meaningless”* (Eccl. 2:17-23).

Recently, my wife and I were in Baltimore for a wedding. Jacklyn showed me the neighborhood in which she grew up; the little home where her parents raised five children. Two doors down lived Mr. Lowe, a retired guy who may have had the most immaculate property in all Baltimore. His flower beds faultless, his shrubs beautifully pruned, his grass lush and manicured. Mr. Lowe made it clear he didn’t want anyone walking on his grass. If one of the neighborhood boys accidentally kicked a ball over his fence, Mr. Lowe would keep the ball.

He’s long gone now, but his house is still there, and it’s a bit of a mess. In fact, it’s the most neglected house in the neighborhood. The grass is scruffy, the shrubs overgrown. Some siding on the house is missing. Everything once important to Mr. Lowe is now in the hands of someone who cannot or will not maintain it. If Mr. Lowe only knew, he might sound like Ecclesiastes: “*I hated all my toil in which I toiled under the sun, seeing that I must leave it to the man who will come after me, and who knows whether he will be wise or a fool? Yet he will be master of all for which I toiled and used my wisdom under the sun” (Eccl. 2:18).*

After that, we went out to see her grandmother’s ice cream shop. Her grandparents lived above; the shop was below. For decades, it was a happy, welcoming place, a gathering spot for families. Jacklyn remembers the gleaming counter trimmed with polished chrome and red bar stools that swiveled. When her grandparents retired, someone turned it into a bar. Today, it’s a vacant eyesore, an imposing wreck of a building. The screens on the porch are torn, windows are cracked. There are “No Trespassing” signs. “*What does a man get for all the toil and anxious striving with which he labors under the sun?”*

One more. Later that day, at the wedding, we visited with an older gentleman, an entrepreneur who built a small, niche business: the repairing of commercial laundry equipment. His life orbited around this business. It was his baby. He conceived it, gave birth to it, nursed it all his life. Now, he’s trying to retire, needs to retire. Trouble is, there’s no one interested in buying or operating it. His workers have gone on to other things. His son has zero interest. All his life, he’s worked hard to keep this little business alive; now he must, in his own words, “kill it,” and it’s tearing him apart. You could tell his identity and purpose were all wrapped up in that business. Now that he’s about to turn off the lights and lock the doors, who is he? What has he accomplished? “*For of the wise as of the fool there is no enduring remembrance, seeing that in the days to come all will have been long forgotten” (Eccl. 2:15*).

Don’t set your heart on things that perish: your house, your business, your reputation, your accomplishments. Do good work, but don’t let yourself be consumed by it. You need things that will endure. [Confirmands] You need things that are dependable. You don’t need a lot of followers on social media; you need to be following Jesus. You need to be about things eternal, not things temporal. You need true security . . . not a dead bolt and a door cam. Don’t spend your life chasing after the wind. You need the things Jesus came to win for us.

Riding into the city on that donkey, the crowds assumed His aim was to be crowned the new king. They assumed His goal was to expel the Romans and usher in a new era of freedom and independence. But no, His aim was not on anything so earthly or fleeting. His aim was to give those crowds (and us) something much better. Eternal life. Eternal freedom from oppression. Paul wrote, “So we fix our eyes not on what is seen, but on what is unseen, since what is seen is temporary, but what is unseen is eternal” (2 Cor. 4:18). In Colossians 3, Paul also wrote, “Set your minds on things above, not on earthly things” (v. 3) because the things of this earth are all temporary, fleeting, transitory. Everything on this earth has an expiration date. You and me included.

Economists talk of durable goods, products that have a long lifespan and are used repeatedly over time, such as appliances, furniture, cars, and the like. But I’ve never been very impressed with how durable “durable” goods are. I’m constantly replacing these things. Durable goods should be resilient, right? Long lasting, hard-wearing, nearly indestructible. None of these things have been that for me. I remember a car salesman telling me, “Change the oil regularly, and this baby will last forever.” That was three cars ago. Don’t set your hearts on stuff that doesn’t last.

Your home might be as immaculate as Mr. Lowes’. It’s not going to stay that way. Your car might purr like a kitten. Give it time, and soon it’ll just be another squeaking rig on the bumpy streets of Watertown. You might keep your body fit as a fiddle, and your mind sharp as a tack, but give it enough time, and it will be hard to distinguish all that from the dust.

Jesus said it this way, “Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal, but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also” (Mt. 6:19-21). Don’t let your hearts be so caught up in things temporal that you forfeit the things eternal.

You need that which is truly durable. You need the eternal. You need Jesus and those truly durable goods for which He marched into Jerusalem. You need the salvation He won on the cross.

As His adoring crowds waved palm branches and laid their cloaks on the ground, Jesus was not at all swayed by the temporal allure of earthly power and glory. His mission was not focused on fortune or fame. His mission was the redemption of your soul and your body. His aim was *not* to be crowned with gold, but with thorns. He came to fulfill the will of the Father and to reconcile you to God through His sacrificial death on the cross. He willingly laid down His temporal life so that you might have eternal life.

Therefore, keep in check your ambitions and desires, and remember that true riches are found only in Him, in His grace, in His forgiveness, in His salvation. “Seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, knowing that all these things will be added unto us” (Mt. 6:33). All our worldly pursuits are fleeting. The accolades of the world are transient. But the love and salvation given you by our Lord are eternal, unchanging, durable. Moth and rust cannot destroy it. Thieves cannot steal it. Death cannot undo it or transfer its ownership to anyone else. It is yours by grace through faith and not even death or the devil can take it away from you.

The love of God and the salvation He won are eternal. Paul wrote, “our citizenship is in heaven” (Phil. 3:20-21). Because of Jesus, that’s where we belong. That’s where our true home is. And from there we eagerly await the return of the Lord Jesus Christ, “who will transform our lowly bodies so that they will be like His glorious body,” a better version of ourselves than any other version that ever existed on earth.

A beautiful little home in Baltimore. A thriving Ice Cream shop. A small business that provided a needed service. All these looked like victories. Today, all these look like defeats. Sooner or later, all transitory things look like defeat. Nations rise and fall, neighborhoods grow and decline, people are born, grow old, wear out, and die, but the Word of our God stands forever. The promises of our Lord stand forever.

Jesus dead on a cross looks like defeat. But Jesus alive from the grave, risen from the dead, tells us His death was not a defeat. It was a victory, is a victory. . . the greatest victory. An enduring and eternal victory . . . your victory and mine. Amen.