Hello Brothers and Sisters! Shall we be vain today?

I am reading in Ecclesiastes, the opening chapter. This is part of my regular reading, so I am not in a funk or unhappy. This is Solomon near the end of his life and taking careful stock of that life. So with the gathering of dusk and the aches of old age, he is trying to see what was worth it all and what wasn’t. He does not draw a happy picture.

You don’t need to be in a funk to read Ecclesiastes and you probably shouldn’t if you are in one. Solomon does remind us of one who has much, lives much, comes to depend on that much for his self-worth and then sees that it all will soon pass. All that “much,” and no one had more of it than Solomon in all of this world. He was being reminded that all of it will be lost to the one who holds it. In Chapter one he is only half way through that realization.

No one had more than Solomon because the Lord had blessed him with wealth and peace. No one was more capable of using that blessing wisely because he was the wisest of men. So we can assume that he used it wisely, and people praised him for all that he had done, and, that by even our accounting his works would have been impressive. But here he is counting it all as nothing. It is a Hebrew colloquialism meaning the ultimate of vanities; nothing. It is less than nothing because it was considered something, but now is recognized for what it really is.

Solomon is not saying that he should not have done what he did, but that his vision was shortsighted. We live as if we are permanent and significant in ourselves. In all the working and congratulating one another on those works, we lose sight of how fleeting it all is. There is nothing new under the sun. Our works pass not long after us, and we are remembered no more. Look on the names on the top of the buildings in down town Goshen. Who now remembers those men and women who built them? And how soon will that building be replaced by another? We remember the name Solomon, but what do we remember? Wisdom or foolishness, because he was both.

The aim of the book – and this devotional – is not to depress, but to get to the conclusion. Solomon said that the conclusion in 12 chapters of vanity and regret is that we are to fear God. Not shaking in our boots fear – but the Jews used this expression to remind us of Who is in charge and to serve Him. We are not to fear our circumstances nor are we to worship our works – which we may have been doing before this quarantine. We labor because of God who called us.

We will probably doing the exact same work for God – but with an attitude that we do not do this because we get satisfaction from finishing the task. We do it for the God who called us. Oh, we can still have satisfaction, but now because it please the Lord. God does not care for castles over cottages – He needs neither. What He calls us to is faithfulness. Martin Luther, who lived in really troubling times, said that if he knew that the world was ending tomorrow, but the Lord called him to plant an apple tree today, then he would plant an apple tree today.

So if God is calling you to plant apple trees today, plant away. God will reward, and you can have the satisfaction – and the joy – that in all things you have pleased the Lord. And when you come to the end of your life, you will not have the regrets of Solomon.

In Christ, Pastor EA