

Contentment

Ecclesiastes 5:10-20

Trinity Lutheran – Kearney, Missouri

October 18, 2015 – Twenty-First Sunday After Pentecost

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Grace to you and peace, from God our Father, and from our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen. Near the end of today's Old Testament lesson, God states that it would be a good thing for you to "accept {your} lot and rejoice in {your} toil" – to rejoice and be glad about your hard labor "under the sun." Then He goes on to explain that when you accept your lot and rejoice in your hard labors, "this is the gift of God." Dear Christian, with these words God is speaking to everyone, not merely employers or employees. Many Christians go off to their jobs every day and work hard toiling "under the sun" so as to bring home money to support their families. If you happen to be one of those people, God is certainly speaking to you when He says: "rejoice in your toil." But employed people aren't the only ones to whom God is here speaking. To be sure, He is speaking to all of us when He says: "rejoice in your toil."

Consider the stay-at-home mom who cringes when asked: "So, do you work or just stay at home?" – suggesting, perhaps, that stay-at-home moms don't actually do *any* work, which, of course, couldn't be further from the truth. So God says to them in their labors that they are to "rejoice in their toil." Many Christians are of an age where they could be in the work force, and yet can't hold down a job on account of health, weakness of the body, struggles in the mind, or other complications that might prevent them from holding down a nine-to-five job. It would be foolish to think that people with handicaps or disabilities don't work hard. Indeed, people with such challenges actually have to work harder than most others simply to get through the day. So God says to those who have struggles in their bodies or minds: "rejoice in your toil."

Many younger Christians likewise toil and labor in various ways. Some struggle with school, others struggle with a bad situation at home or school, most struggle to figure out who they are and where they belong. All of childhood – especially the teenage years, but all of childhood – could be thought of as hard work and long toil as they wrestle to figure out how to be an adult. So God says to you children: "rejoice in your toil." Retired Christians likewise are apt to feel the weight of their "toiling under the sun." Many Christians retire from wage-earning, only to take on more responsibilities in their extended families, their congregations, or the community. I've talked to a goodly number of

retirees, and most of them have expressed the feeling that they work harder now than when they were in "holding down a job." Hence God says to you who are retired: "rejoice in your toil."

Now it would be quite easy for you to be offended when you hear God say to you that you ought to "accept {your} lot and rejoice in {your} toil." And I suspect it would be especially easy to take offense at God's Words when you aren't feeling happy about your lot in life, or if you don't enjoy the toil of your labor. But when God says to you: "accept {your} lot and rejoice in {your} toil," He's not acting as some domineering, demanding overlord who wants you to suffer in silence. Rather, God speaks these Words to you so that you think of your place in life as a good gift from Him. He wants you to be content with your life no matter what situation you might find yourself in at any particular moment in time.

Certainly God is intimately aware of how hard you wage-earners have to work in order to put food on the table. But He also knows that more money in your wallet isn't necessarily the solution to your problems. Why? Well, look at the text. "He who loves money will not be satisfied with money. When goods increase, they increase who eat them." Stated another way, God knows that if you double your income Monday, by Tuesday you may well already have every penny of it committed, and by Wednesday you'll still feel as though you don't have enough. That sounds very much like the rich young ruler from last Sunday's Gospel. Yet God promises that He will open His hand and satisfy the desire of every living thing. He has sworn an oath to you that you are worth far more than the birds of the air or the lilies of the field – and that even Solomon in all his glory was not clothed as beautifully as they.

God, you see, is not the least bit surprised that we often struggle with afflictions of body and mind, for the entire creation is so thoroughly entrenched in sin that it would be impossible for you not to feel the effects of sin in your body and mind. And you mustn't ever forget that God created both your body and your mind. He knows every ache in your body and every struggle you're experiencing, even as He even knows the number of hairs on your head. And God has lovingly and graciously allowed whatever crosses you might be bearing to come into your life so that you might follow Je-

sus. Indeed, it was our Lord Jesus Himself who said that you are to take up your cross and follow Him – or, as the writer of Ecclesiastes says: you should “accept {your} lot and rejoice in {your} toil – this is the gift of God.”

Teenagers shouldn’t try to pretend they’re thirty years old. Retirees shouldn’t try to pretend they’re thirty years old. And sixty-nine-year-old pastors shouldn’t try to pretend they’re thirty years old. If God wanted to fill the world with thirty-somethings, He would have made it so. But God has not done that. Rather God has given to each of us a lot and a place in life. For example, God wants some Christians to be older women, so that they might teach the younger women what it means to be a mature Christian woman. And the same can be said of older men, too. God wants some Christians to have more money so that they might show love for their neighbor, and God wants some to have less money so that they might be loved by their neighbor. God wants adults to care for children, to intervene for them, and “bring them up in the fear and instruction of the Lord.” God wants young men to respect the old, honoring them in their old age. He wants employees to work hard for their employers, employers to provide for the needs of their employees, parishioners to care for their pastors and their families, and pastors to lay down their lives for the sake of the sheep who have been committed to their care.

Even beyond all that, God wants us Christians to feel and experience all the various limitations of both body and mind. And all this He wants so that His Christian people will have no choice but to abandon their sin of self-confidence and trust in Him alone for every grace and favor. Dear Christian, God has called each and every one of you to be content with what you have and who you are. This is because God has lovingly created you to be who you are and to have what you have. “Accept {your} lot and rejoice in {your} toil,” says the Lord, “this is the gift of God.” This is “contentment,” which is only possible through the gift and miracle of our dear Lord Jesus Christ, “who is God over all, forever praised!”

Beloved, our Lord Jesus Christ purchased and won contentment for you in His death and resurrection. This is vitally important to understand, because there are always going to be times when you feel great discontent because of the sins, injuries, or regrets of your past. But what you often fail to remember at such times is that our Lord Christ Himself shed His very own lifeblood and died on the cross so that those sins, injuries, and regrets of your past might be washed away and be done with for time and eternity – never to trouble you again! This is what our Lord Himself promises and says to you

personally: “For as high as the heavens are above the earth, so great is His steadfast love toward those who fear Him; as far as the east is from the west, so far does He remove our transgressions from us.”

Perhaps there are some of you who feel great discontentment because of fears and worries about your future. What you fail to remember at times like that is that Jesus Christ rose from the dead! And in that rising, our Lord Jesus secured for you an eternal future and place in God’s presence that can never be taken away. This, too, is what our Lord Himself promises and says to you through St. Paul: “According to His great mercy, He has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, to an inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading, kept in heaven for you, who by God’s power are being guarded through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time.”

And still there are others of you for whom neither the future nor the present is the cause of your discontent. What causes discontent for you is your disdain for the here-and-now. And so Jesus also has a powerful promise and comfort for you as well so that you might also embrace and hold fast to this gift of contentment. “I tell you,” He says, “do not be anxious about your life, what you will eat or what you will drink, nor about your body, what you will put on. Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothing? Look at the birds of the air: they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not of more value than they? And which of you by being anxious can add a single hour to his span of life? And why are you anxious about clothing? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow: they neither toil nor spin, yet I tell you, even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these. But if God so clothes the grass of the field, which today is alive and tomorrow is thrown into the oven, will he not much more clothe you, O you of little faith? Therefore do not be anxious, saying, ‘What shall we eat?’ or ‘What shall we drink?’ or ‘What shall we wear?’ For the Gentiles seek after all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them all.”

So, if you Boil down all these divine Words, what do you have left? Quite simply you have these words which have lovingly and carefully been spoken to you by your God in this morning’s Old Testament lesson – words that been spoken to you in mercy and in peace – words which God intends always to comfort, strengthen and sustain you in every situation and perilous circumstance of life: “Accept {your} lot and rejoice in {your} toil – this is the gift from God” – a gift which comes to you through our Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.