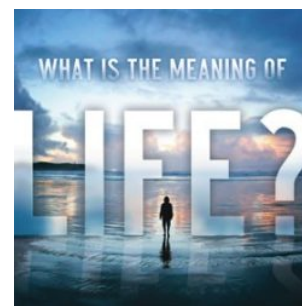


Dorset South & West. Written Service.

Sunday August 3rd 2025

The meaning in life.

Prepared by Revd Jean Quick.



Call to Worship. Ecclesiastes 4 :5-7

Generations come and generations go, but the earth remains for ever. The sun rises and the sun sets, and hurries back to where it rises. The wind blows to the south and turns to the north; round and round it goes, ever returning on its course. All streams flow into the sea, yet the sea is never full. To the place the streams come from, there they return again.

STF 82

O Lord, my God, when I in awesome wonder
consider all the works thy hand hath made,
I see the stars, I hear the mighty thunder,
thy power throughout the universe displayed:

*Then sings my soul, my Saviour God, to thee:
how great thou art, how great thou art!
Then sings my soul, my Saviour God, to thee:
how great thou art, how great thou art!*

When through the woods and forest glades I
wander
and hear the birds sing sweetly in the trees;
when I look down from lofty mountain grandeur,
and hear the brook, and feel the gentle breeze:

And when I think that God, his Son not sparing,
sent him to die, I scarce can take it in
that on the cross, my burden gladly bearing,
he bled and died to take away my sin:

When Christ shall come with shout of acclamation
and take me home - what joy shall fill my heart;
then shall I bow in humble adoration,
and there proclaim: my God, how great thou art:

Prayers of adoration and confession

Eternal God, we praise you for your boundless love and faithfulness. You are the creator of all things, the source of all life, and the sustainer of all creation. Your power is infinite, your wisdom unmatched, and your presence fills the universe. We are in awe of your majesty and beauty, and we offer you our heartfelt adoration.

Prayer of Confession: Lord, we confess that we have fallen short of your glory. We have often chosen our own way over yours, and we have allowed sin to take root in our hearts. We have been full of pride, selfish, and disobedient. We have failed to love you with all our heart, soul, mind, and strength, and we have not loved our neighbours as ourselves. Forgive us, Lord, for the ways we have sinned against you and against others. By your mercy forgive us, and help us to turn away from our sinful ways."

We thank you, God, for your grace and forgiveness, which are freely given to us through your Son, Jesus Christ. We trust in your power to transform us and to make us new. Help us to live lives that are pleasing to you, and to reflect your love to the world. In Jesus' name we pray, **Amen**

Bible reading. Luke 12:13-21.

Someone in the crowd said to him, 'Teacher, tell my brother to divide the inheritance with me.' Jesus replied, 'Man, who appointed me a judge or an arbiter between you?' Then he said to them, 'Watch out! Be on your guard against all kinds of greed; life does not consist in an abundance of possessions.' And he told them this parable: 'The ground of a certain rich man yielded an abundant harvest. He thought to himself, "What shall I do? I have no place to store my crops." 'Then he said, "This is what I'll do. I will tear down my barns and build bigger ones, and there I will store my surplus grain. And I'll say to myself, 'You have plenty of grain laid up for many years. Take life easy; eat, drink and be merry.'" 'But God said to him, "You fool! This very night your life will be demanded from you. Then who will get what you have prepared for yourself?" 'This is how it will be with whoever stores up things for themselves but is not rich towards God.'

Reflection

I have always been fascinated in the stories that come from Greek Mythology. I recently read about the myth of Sisyphus. You might know the story? In the story, Sisyphus was an evil king who made bitter enemies out of everybody, from humans to Greek gods alike. When the Greek gods finally caught up with him, they were so angry with him that they devised a special punishment in the afterlife just for him. So this was his punishment: Sisyphus would have to, with great effort, push a heavy boulder up a hill. But there's a twist: when he got up to the top of the hill, the boulder was enchanted by the gods, so that it would move away from him, and then it would sort of jump away and would roll right back down the hill. And so Sisyphus would have to go back down and start rolling the boulder up hill again because he would never ever complete the task. This would be repeated again and again, for eternity. I think this myth is so applicable to us today,

because it so memorably illustrates the frustration and futility that we sometimes experience in our lives. Life seems like an endless cycle of meaningless tasks and we seem to be on some sort of treadmill. Around and around we go, and up the hill and down the hill. But have you ever stopped to ask yourself: what's is the point of it all? Where is it all going? Are our lives just one big Sisyphean punishment? A task that can never be accomplished.

Our call to worship comes from The book of Ecclesiastes. King Solomon in contrast to Sisyphus is known as the wisest ruler of all time. He wrote in what we call the book of Ecclesiastes right at it's beginning : 'Meaningless! Meaningless!' 'Utterly meaningless! Everything is meaningless.' What do people gain from all their labours at which they toil under the sun? Or as the King James Version puts it , "Vanity of vanities," "Vanity of vanities, all *is* vanity." Life is meaningless or the ultimate vanity! The words almost explain the same sentiment Jesus used in telling a story in response to a question about possession's and inheritance rights.

It's no wonder that we don't often turn to the Book of Ecclesiastes. What has got into King Solomon. The man who seemed to have it all. Riches, wisdom everything. 1 Kings 4: 30-34 says Solomon's wisdom was greater than the wisdom of all the people of the East, and greater than all the wisdom of Egypt. " He was wiser than anyone else," "And his fame spread to all the surrounding nations. He spoke three thousand proverbs and his songs numbered a thousand and five. He spoke about plant life, from the cedar of Lebanon to the hyssop that grows out of walls. He also spoke about animals and birds, reptiles and fish. From all nations people came to listen to Solomon's wisdom, sent by all the kings of the world, who had heard of his wisdom."

We can see that he was a philosopher and an artist. A great preacher and writer of spiritual songs. He was also a great biologist, 1 Kings 4 also tells us he could describe and teach about all plant and animal life in the known world. He is a King, a Lover, a Philosopher, an Artist, a Scientist. He builds up his kingdom to be the envy of the whole world. He is the most famous, most wealthy, most powerful, most intelligent, most desired man in the world. And yet looking back on his life he says, "Meaningless, meaningless, utterly meaningless, everything is meaningless." Is he having an off day? Or in old age has he become a disgruntled grumpy ruler? Ecclesiastes is not the diary of a disgruntled loser. These are the reflections of one of life's greatest success stories. Yet the first thing he wants us to know is "Meaningless, meaningless, utterly meaningless, everything is meaningless." It's shocking stuff isn't it? We are used to hearing encouraging words from our Monarchy. Imagine your a subject in King Solomon's day. Can you imagine a news report that had this in it?

"A report released today concludes that life is a wearisome burden. In findings that will shock both religious and secular leaders the report describes even mankind's greatest achievements as a "chasing after the wind." The 12 chapter study commissioned by the king, cost millions of pounds and took 30 years to research. It challenges many previously held beliefs and has drawn stern opposition from some critics, accusing the author of being "a bit bleak." Commenting on the report, its author said in a statement: "Meaningless, Meaningless, Utterly Meaningless, Everything is Meaningless."

Can you imagine a news reader commenting on the King's latest declaration? Or jump forward to today and if a similar statement was issued by King Charles? Is life meaningless are we caught up in a Sisyphean world?

Now let's jump forward to the story told by Jesus in response to the question about inheritance. It does seem to express a similar point. In Luke's gospel we have a question that is answered by asking us to look at, our stuff, our hoarding, at what we put our investment in, at what we crave and how it is meaningless?

However we first need to understand the laws of inheritance in Jesus' time. We know from Jewish law that the firstborn received as his birthright twice the inheritance received by younger siblings. The oldest brother was then responsible for the support of his mother, if she were still living, along with any unmarried sisters in the family. That was a key reason why the oldest son got double the inheritance. It wasn't because he was twice as special; it was because he now had twice the responsibility. We also know that the typical estate in Jesus' day would be settled in a few months and evidently this one wasn't being settled. Evidently the older brother didn't want to divide the family property, which would mean a reduction in the overall wealth of the family estate. The younger brother doesn't care about that; he just wants his fair share. But one thing *is* certain from the Lord's response here: both brothers are embroiled in this inheritance dispute. The younger brother wants more than he has, and the older brother is determined to hang on to what he has, and it's getting ugly. If you take a closer look at verse 13 you realise that this younger brother isn't *asking* Jesus what to do about it, he's *telling* Jesus what to do about it. "Jesus! Tell my brother to divide the inheritance with me!" And Jesus refuses. But now the Lord responds in a more general fashion, not only to this younger brother, but to the crowd around Him, and remember, verse 1 told us that thousands of people were jammed in everywhere to hear Him. And they would certainly want to know what Jesus had to say about something like this which would affect them all, sooner or later. But instead of expounding on the finer points of inheritance law, Jesus goes deeper; in fact, He goes directly to the heart. In verse 15, Jesus said to them: "Take care, and be on your guard against all covetousness"

We all have too much stuff. Have you ever bought new stuff to organise and hold your old stuff in order to make room for more stuff? I came to dread opening the Tupperware cupboard. Masses of boxes and lids would fall out of the shelves. Even buying a box to store them in didn't help. Whenever I wanted to use a box



to store some of the glut of whatever I had made, oh the struggle to find the right lid! Then you put lots of boxes neatly labelled into the chest freezer and in time the labels fall off, you forget the boxes in the bottom of the freezer and the produce you laboured to preserve is only fit for the compost bin, meaningless, utterly meaningless! Did you notice that the main character in Jesus' story is given his obituary before his death! And it is not complementary. You can almost imagine the man thinking how well people will think of him. He was as we would say, a self made successful businessman. Jesus doesn't condemn his wealth, just his attitude towards it. I can imagine that, in a much bigger sense than my Tupperware boxes of unknown food, that much of what he builds bigger barns for, will eventually become spoiled and useless. The sin of this rich man is not his frugality but that he has isolated himself from his fellow humanity, from the larger community and from God himself. But then he is *interested* in no one but his own self. He is not interested in sharing with those who have less. He doesn't even see such folks. They exist beyond the margins of his consciousness. But please notice God's last question: "Then who will get what you have prepared for yourself?" It is an open, unanswered question. The implication, however, seems to be that by his death, all that life-giving, staff-of-life grain will go to feed the very people he had failed to notice! By his death he became a dispenser of life after all. But not in an heroic way. That does not make this parable's ending a "happy ending" after all. Yet sometimes it does happen that by death can come new life.

This rich man who ignored God is, of course, a counter-example for what Christians are to be. But that is no surprise since Christians follow a man who once said, "Unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains just a single grain. But if it dies, it bears much fruit." By his death and resurrection Jesus gives us the staff of life. It sets the tone for our own daily dying and rising with Christ, too.

I have as I am sure we all have, experienced the unpleasant side that can emerge when a loved one dies and the family members fight over what is left. One overlooked aspect of the question Jesus is faced with is that someone has died. A Father who has left provision for his family and are they grateful? Seemingly their grief has been replaced by greed. How sad. We all probably have aspirations of what will become with our treasured possessions, but are they the things that truly matter? I do have a few things that belonged to past members of families and friends. However it's not the things that are important but the memories of the loved one that they invoke. In the story of the rich fool and in king Solomon's words what reminds us of the greatest love of all? The love of God? The rich fool seems to only think about himself and it's not until the last of the twelve chapters of Ecclesiastes that we hear about God. Jesus and Solomon seem to be surveying the merits of life and pointing out that without God life is meaningless. "fear God and keep his commands; this is the whole duty of humans. For God will bring every deed into judgment, every hidden thing, whether good or evil" (Ec. 12:13-14).

We hear it said, "we come into the world with nothing and we will leave with nothing...you can't take it with you". Not completely correct. We are born out of love and the Christian faith and our hope is that we will dwell with the ultimate love, God our Heavenly Father. We know that true love is not meaningless and that God loves us with a love that will never fail or fade away.

So often people hang onto meaningless things because we fear for the future. We might need this or that. With the current economic situation we worry about what will be the future and how we might future proof ourselves. Much like the Rich Fool. We look back on what we call the good old days when things weren't so expensive. But incomes were lower and conditions were they better or worse? "Generations come and generations go", we read in Ecclesiastes. I think it's interesting when we talk about the "good old days." Someone asked, "What did you talk about in the 'good old days'?" "We talked about the 'good old days.'" The "good old days" are the result of a great imagination and a loss of memory. Nothing's new and nothing's changed. St. Augustine said, "God made us for Himself. Our souls are restless until they find their rest in God." Jesus said, "Come to Me, all you who labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take My yolk upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls." To find meaning in life is to find our selves following in the way of Christ Jesus. With Jesus life has meaning and purpose.

STF 691

What shall our greeting be:
sign of our unity?
Jesus is Lord!
May we no more defend
barriers he died to end:
give me your hand, my friend -
one Church, one Lord!

What is our mission here?
He makes his purpose clear:
one world, one Lord!
Spirit of truth, descend;

all our confusions end:
give me your hand, my friend -
Jesus is Lord!

He comes to save us now:
to serve him is to know
life's true reward.
May he our lives amend,
all our betrayals end:
give me your hand, my friend -
Jesus is Lord!

Prayers of Intercession.

Heavenly Father, as we ponder the scriptures today, thank You for the honest assessment that they offer of living life in this world, without Christ. Keep me from chasing after any of the vain things that this world offers, knowing that there is nothing on earth that has lasting value except to know You. May I place You in the centre of my life, knowing that the whole duty and delight of humanity is to worship and praise You for Your goodness and grace to all. You give meaning to my life and so I pray for:

Those who are locked into a seemingly meaningless existence. For those struggling with addictions. Those who are struggling living under unjust regimes. For those who just find the 'daily grind' so difficult and utterly meaningless. We pray especially for those who have been brought to our attention this week. Whether known to us or in parts of the world that we have seen in the news.

Bring to them hope and meaning. We pray that you will expand our vision beyond our own needs so that we might do whatever we can to bring aid to those struggling to find meaning.

We pray for Leaders: Lord, grant wisdom and discernment to our leaders, that they may govern justly and wisely, seeking the best for all people.

Loving God, we pray for those who are sick, suffering, or in pain. Grant them healing, comfort, and strength, and help them to find hope and peace in your presence.

We pray for those who are the Grieving. Heavenly Father, we pray for those who mourn the loss of loved ones. Comfort them in their sorrow, and help them to find solace in your promise of eternal life.

Gracious God, we pray for those who feel lost, discouraged, or disillusioned. Guide them by your Holy Spirit, and help them to find their way back to you.

We offer these our prayers and the prayers on our hearts in the words of : **the Lord's Prayer.**

STF 545

Be thou my vision, O Lord of my heart,
be all else but naught to me, save that thou art;
be thou my best thought in the day and the night,
both waking and sleeping, thy presence my light.

Be thou my wisdom, be thou my true word,
be thou ever with me, and I with thee, Lord;
be thou my great Father, thy child let me be;
be thou in me dwelling, and lone with thee.

Be thou my breastplate, my sword for the fight;
be thou my whole armour, be thou my true might;
be thou my soul's shelter, be thou my strong tower:
O raise thou me heavenward, great Power of my power.

Riches I heed not, nor earth's empty praise:
be thou mine inheritance now and always;
be thou and thou only the first in my heart:
O Sovereign of heaven, my treasure thou art.

High King of heaven, thou heaven's bright Sun,
O grant me its joys after victory is won;
Great Heart of my own heart, whatever befall,
still be thou my vision, O Ruler of all.

The Blessing

We go forth into the world in peace; to be of good courage; to hold fast to that which is good; to render to no one evil for evil; to strengthen the fainthearted; to support the weak; to help the afflicted; to honour everyone; to love and serve the Lord, rejoicing in the power of the Holy Spirit; and the blessing of God almighty, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, will be among us and remain with us always. **Amen.**

