

Toiling under the Sun

Ecclesiastes 1:2, 12-14; 2:18-23; Luke 12:13-21
 The Twelfth Sunday after Pentecost
 CtK Builds Sunday

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"All is vanity!" writes the author of Ecclesiastes. "Everything is meaningless!" he cries. "I've tried to be wise, I've tried to be good, I've worked loooong days toiling in the hot summer sun, and I have nothing meaningful to show for any of it."

I won't ask for a show of hands, but I do wonder how many of you hard-working people out there might in some way relate to the feelings this guy is expressing. I love hearing a text like Ecclesiastes because it reminds me how *all* of my feelings, *all* of my struggles, *all* of my stubbornness and grumbling is represented right there in the Holy Bible.

I'm not proud of it, but there have been long days of work in my life, long hours spent trying to do the right thing, where I was left without the feeling of personal fulfillment or accomplishment that I so desperately wanted. "So then...What's the point of it all?" I wonder.

And then Jesus has to take things one-step further. You see, Jesus tells this parable of a rich man who is *enormously* satisfied by his toiling under the sun. This man's crops grow so *much*, and he grows so *rich*, that he is faced with the problem of, "Where am I going to put all of *my* wealth?"

The rich man of this parable struggles with the same self-possessiveness of the frustrated man of Ecclesiastes. Completely alone in the world, the rich man even carries on a conversation with his own self! "What should *I* do?" he wonders. He says to himself, "Self, you have so much wealth that you should just *build bigger barns!* That way, self, you and I will always be happy."

The twist? Well, God tells the man that that very night he will die, so what good will a bunch of barns do then? Which, in a sense, brings us right back to Ecclesiastes. You can work all day building bigger barns. You can invest so much time and money and sweat into building up your own wealth...but, in the end, if that is *all* you have, it's meaningless. Big barns by themselves can never save you. So what will you do with your life? What is work really for?

Well, here at Christ the King there has been a very odd – dare I say *foolish!* – thing happening for many years. You see, we have these strange people here who give considerable amounts of summer time to go someplace and *toil under the sun*. They *work hard building barns* for other people all day. And they pay money to do it! What is that all about?? If work is meaningless, if toil is nothing but agony, why would a person ever pay in order to *travel* to another place and sweat all day building structures?

This is what we are getting to the bottom of today. Why does CtK build? I suspect you will find that it has something to do with service. And service has something to do with Jesus. And Jesus has something to do with meaning, salvation, and, love.

But at the risk of carrying on a conversation with myself like that rich fool, I'm going to let a couple of our foolish CtK builders tell you in their own words why they do this thing.

First, I'll invite up Tim Van Rooy to share about the Habitat for Humanity mission that he's dedicated so much of his life and time to over the years... [\(brief comments by Tim\)](#)

We build out of tradition. We build out of love for others. We build because providing stability and warmth and shelter to another person is what we are called to do. We build because home ownership is related to outcomes in education and health and employment and healthier communities. When a structure is filled with only our own wealth and crops, it is a barn. But when it is filled with our neighbors who are striving to live an abundant life, it is so much more than a barn: it is a home. It is a place of grace.

Next we will hear from Alycia Howard, a participant on our Appalachian Service Project for many years... [\(brief comments by Alycia\)](#)

My time with Alycia and the 31 other ASP volunteers from Christ the King this past June was absolutely a highlight for me. Young people like Alycia just *get it* in a way that the rich fool did not.

They understand that wherever we find ourselves in the midst of relationships that are new and exciting, God is there, too. They understand that we toil and sweat and challenge ourselves so that others don't have to. They understand that as long as we have communion with each other our work will *never* be in vain. I learned so much from them on this trip, and I hope that you all take the opportunity to learn from them, too.

All is not vanity. We, the church, preach hope in the midst of despair. We worship a God who promises new life after death. In faith, we plant seeds and lay foundations that, through the power of God's Spirit, will bear fruit long after we are gone.

So how else do we build? When we toil to mentor a young person or someone struggling in school: CtK builds. When we use our musical gifts to create beautiful, meaningful worship: CtK builds. When we extend words of hospitality and welcome to our neighbors of other faiths: CtK builds. When we fill this big building of ours with volunteers serving those in need: CtK builds. When we accompany one another in grief. When we forgive each other. When we pray. When we name God's presence in our midst. Whenever we make the effort to get to know someone in this congregation who we hadn't known before: CtK builds!

Together, in this place, as the body of Christ, we build up God's kingdom far beyond our own vision to see or comprehend it. This church is so much more than a big and spacious barn. It is us. It is God's people holding fast to the promises of God in Jesus Christ. Let's keep building.

Amen.

