

HOME GROUPS

Well done, keep going. Pretty please don't forget to send someone to the Rectory Thursday 24th Nov 7.30pm and the same person (or two) in January 12th.

You'll get notes for next week but then you might find yourself on your own for Dec – I can let you have the bible readings and some suggested questions but you'll have to listen to the sermons as best you can.

NB the first wed of January – I don't really expect you to be meeting as a Home Group by then, so we're going to have Parish Prayers in St Francis 8-9pm.

Welcome: Here are some questions that FYG2 wanted to ask the Bishop – what do you think he said, what would you have said? More next week.

1. Why do you always wear that pointy hat?
2. Why did God make other planets?
3. Why aren't dinosaurs in the bible?
4. Why do you believe in God?

Worship: I think its really important in this series in Eccles to focus as best you can on Jesus – try singing Jesus is King or Jesus shall reign - you get the idea. Psalm 95.1-7 (or the lot) but can you see why?

Word: *way too many questions this week, sorry.*

1. Read Eccles 3.1-8 – if you already talked about this then you can skip to the next Read.
2. What do you make of this word “time”? is it saying God is in control of time? The Hebrew sort of says There is a *chronological set* time for everything and a season *or a rough appropriate moment* for every activity. Does that mean that there is an appropriate moment to die? And what of those who die young? Does it mean it is appropriate to go to war or to hate? Where does this work or not work? Take out the word “time” and try the phrase “its okay to” and see how that works. Any better? One commentator thinks the whole poem says nothing more that This is life; Stuff happens. Another says that this is what you should do in life.
3. Read Eccles 3.9-22
4. What does it mean for eternity to be set in our hearts?
5. Are we like animals? (vs 18)
6. How many times does Solomon see something but do nothing? (see also 4.1)
7. Read Eccles 4.1-12
8. What on earth is 4.2&3 about?
9. Why did I pick on Hand as my one word?
10. Why is 4vs 9-12 a recommended wedding reading? What might the preacher say at the wedding?
11. How depressing are these chapters? Any tips on how to keep your chin up?

Works: Pray about who you might invite to Christingle / Carols / Nativity ...

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You're expecting the one word sermon to be “**Time**” – it shows up such a lot in today's reading.

But there are so many different interpretations of this Time poem – ranging from: this is **what we should be** doing – we should be searching and giving up and we should be tearing down and mending – these are the things we should be doing.

Or that it's down to us to work out **when it is appropriate** to weep and when we should laugh. This can make it tricky when you ask When is it appropriate to Hate? When is it appropriate to give up? And what on earth is that whole scatter stones thing about. (It could be building / dismantling of home or in time of war some armies would ruin a field by scattering stones over it – I'm not convinced by either of these).

Others want to interpret this poem as being the sign that **God is in control** – God is the one who says when we are born, when we die, when we go to war, when we shall have peace.

Others still, and I think that I am one of them say This poem is **merely the stuff** that happens in life. Like the bumper sticker Stuff Happens (or something like that).

This is the stuff that happens in life, we live we die, we look for things we give up, we mourn we dance. This is life.

The poem isn't trying to say anything about what's right or what's wrong. It's **not about fault** or duty, its not about you or me or God. Stuff Happens, this is life: **We love we hate** – that may or may not be appropriate – but it happens.

So Time is not my one word sermon for you. My one word sermon is Hand. **Hand**, singular.

A couple of weeks ago I was quite **grumpy** because I had settled on the idea of my one word sermon being the word **Meaningless** so I was meditating on how meaningless everything is, a chasing after the wind, a vapour. And I came to realise that that wasn't helpful so last time I preached my one word was **Look Up**.

This week I have had moments of quiet **anger**. The frustrations of life, so much to do, so little time and its annoying. Here we are trapped in time, a time for this, a time for that.

The source of the **frustration** comes from two places. The first source of this anger is Human. In particular: **Solomon**. Solomon says I have **seen the burden** God has laid on men – that we are trapped in this dimension of time.

I saw (vs16) **wickedness** in the Courts where there should have been justice. **I saw oppression** (4.1) – the tears of the oppressed. **I saw a man** all alone with no one to help him (4.8).

And it makes me angry because Solomon is the King. It's his job **not to just SEE but to do** something about it. He has the power and he sees the injustice and that's it! That makes me cross.

By and large I don't see, I'm too wrapped up in my own agenda but on the rare occasion that I do see, that we see some injustice, some oppression then we shouldn't leave it to the professionals, we should kick up a stink, write a letter, **go and camp outside a church**, get wound up and cross and vent some of it.

Maybe so much of life is meaningless and vapour but that **doesn't excuse us** from walking past something that we know to be unjust especially if there is something that we can do about it. However small.

SO this bible reading got me a little angry and cross. Solomon – a **man of power** and wisdom and responsibility and he **Sees** all these things but does nothing.

There's a little **parable** at the end of CH4 – (vss13ff) Solomon says **I saw** an old foolish king getting usurped by a young upstart and everyone following him and then in turn he seemed to let down his followers.

And I can't help wondering if this is **Solomon himself** reflecting on some recent history – **King Saul**, the first king of Israel. He did an excellent job of bringing the tribes together and solidifying the boundaries of the country.

But along comes a man who is brilliant on the **guitar** and with a lucky shot kills a giant and the luck just seems to stick to him so that no matter what kind of battles he gets into he always seems to come out on top. So everyone loves the new boy and they sing songs about him and so on.

So when **King Saul** dies, this new young trendy boy becomes king – King David, Solomon's father. Is Solomon saying My dad was the trendy young thing and everyone followed him but then over time **he became the old foolish** king who no longer listened?

Or is this Solomon himself, who had managed to get the throne as his father David was dying but now **Solomon** is the old man who **no longer hears the warnings** of the prophets.

(It's a good thing that Solomon is long dead because if he heard this sermon that he would probably have my head off!)

So I've been angry because **Solomon saw** lots of things that were wrong with his country but **doesn't use** that seeing as a catalyst for action. Very often we don't see, but sometimes we do see. On the rare occasion that we do see something then we should **have a go** at speaking out for justice. I'm not that good at it, I can be as apathetic as Solomon seems to be but that doesn't make it alright.

The other reason for my anger isn't just Man, Solomon's apathy – he **sees wrong things** and **does nothing** – instead it leads him to conclude how meaningless life is. The other reason for my anger is **God**. We see injustice and oppression and someone alone with no one to help him and we cry out and we want God to do more.

One recent quote from Facebook by Stephen King (famous author of horror stories) **Harry Potter** is about confronting fears, finding an inner strength and doing what is right in the face of adversity. Twilight is about how important it is to have a boyfriend. !

Another quote from someone says: Sometimes **I'd like to ask God** why He allows poverty, famine and injustice when He could do something about it – But I'm afraid God might ask me the same question.

We **cry out to God** for God to come and intervene and do something. We **pray for mercy** and justice for grace and peace, for God to bring in His Kingdom.

The book of Ecclesiastes is such a **terribly depressing** and **lonely** book – life is all so meaningless, everything under the sun is vapour and chasing after the wind.

And we get so **absorbed** in the heavy sorrow of Ecclesiastes that we can fail to spot God. As Bishop Wallace was saying to me the other day We don't pay enough attention to what God is doing!

And God is at work even in this little passage here. God is involved, we're not left alone.

Its not as if God is above the sun **whilst below the sun** is this godless realm where we live.

Instead we find that **God is involved** – **He has given** us a burden and the burden is that God has set eternity in our hearts. We live in this world of time, a time for this and a time for that where stuff happens and its **frustrating**. Its frustrating because within us is this **call to something higher**.

God has set eternity in our hearts but in the meantime we live in time. If it seems frustrating, then well done, it is **designed** to be! God has set eternity in our hearts. **God has made everything** to be beautiful in its time.

Whatever **God does** (3v14) lasts forever. (again vs 14) **God does things** for the purpose of calling us to worship, to revere God. God is at work, calling us to **Look Up**, not just to see things above the sun, but to spot God at work Under the sun.

We read how **God will bring** to judgement, how **God tests us** and shows us that we have no advantage over animals – ooh that's got to hurt – we so want to be like God and the Angels but here we are trapped in time, trapped in this physical decaying body – but like the animals, we too return to the dust.

Even in this little passage God's hand can be seen, He is at work.

So I'm **cross with Solomon** because he **sees** all that's miserable about the world and **does nothing** about it. I'm cross with God because I don't see Him enough – that might not be God's fault.

But here He is at work in chapter 3 but the focus is still on everything being meaningless and that's not fair. God is at work. This should be a **terrific challenge** to me – **what do I focus on?** The meaninglessness of life? Or the hand of God at work around me?

One of the indulgent sports of Bible Scholars is to debate **who wrote different** bits of the bible. I can tell you for certain that St **Paul** did not write the book of Ecclesiastes nor did St John. In this great search for meaning and wisdom, Paul says **Christ Jesus has become for us wisdom** from God (1 Cor 1.18ish) and the **meaning of life is Christ** (try Col 3.3ish).

Meanwhile **John** describes **Jesus as the Word** of God who came from Heaven full of grace and truth, who became human and made his dwelling with us – here is **God who has come under the sun** and lived this so-called meaningless life with us. Jesus died, He rose and ascended and **sent the Holy Spirit**. John describes the Holy Spirit as the **Paraklete** of God – parakaleo – the one who is called along side – sometimes this is translated the **Comforter**.

Solomon looks at the injustice of life – **I saw the tears** of the oppressed and they have **no comforter**, power was on the side of the oppressors and they have no comforter. (The Greek translation of Eccles uses the word paraklete here). **Life is very different for us** than it was for Solomon, with all his wisdom, we know more about God in Jesus than Solomon could ever dream of knowing and we see more of God's Holy Spirit than Solomon ever saw. The world is different. **There is something new under the sun**. And it is God in Jesus, in the Holy Spirit. But even 800 years before the first Christmas, God is at work, even in this ch 3.

We come to a bit of **ordinary proverbial poetry** – the fool folds his hands and ruins himself, better one handful with tranquility than two handfuls with toil and chasing after the wind.

I'm hoping that on the whole it is **self-explanatory**. You don't really need to know that in the **Hebrew** there are three different words for Hand.

The first is the **sluggard's posture**, the lazy man who doesn't get involved. He is his own ruin though he will always think of himself as a victim of it. Is it apathy or **fear of failure** or pretending to himself how terribly busy he is?

Perhaps he thinks he **doesn't have anything** to offer, nothing to give, no skills or talents or **doesn't know how** or where to fit in. Very often the **Church says** we need musicians or florists or Sunday school teachers and you might think – **that's not really me** – actually there's still plenty of work to be done by anyone who's game to lend a hand. But it could be that you're talented in some other way – a **sword swallowing juggler?** – IF God has gifted you in this way – bring it to God, don't fold your hands and sit back – **bring it to God**.

So the **Sluggard's** folding of the hands, OR there's the far extreme alternative: the person with **two handfuls** – the Hebrew points to a grabber and holder – closed, tight fisted.

Perhaps **greedy**, perhaps **nervous** and needing all the security you can hold.

Like the first, this person **isn't a giver either**. Keen to build bigger barns and seek the security that comes from stuff and holding on and not letting go, this person has **no time to give**.

Please note that **these people are also hard to give to**. The first because their hands are folded. They're not easy to help. And the other closed-fist-sort are hard to help. They have their hands so full and their hands are clenched tight - its not easy to give to them either.

So you know the **right answer** already – it is to have **one handful** – hard to say but the Hebrew here implies someone with an open hand, who can receive as well as give.

Someone who stands a little **loose to the stuff and things** of the world and instead is open to receive that sense of peace that knows that they are **held by God**.

The one word was **Hand** – the double meaning is firstly to do with God and spotting God's hand at work in our lives. We who call ourselves Christian, have the Comforter, the Holy Spirit and so the call is on our lives to bring comfort to others.

The second meaning of **Hand** is to do with how we get involved in life – its not enough to **See but Do** nothing.

Jesus said MT 7:21 "**Not everyone** who says to me, '**Lord, Lord,**' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only he who does the will of my Father who is in heaven. And St James wrote - JAS 2:18 ... **Show me your faith** without deeds, and I will show you my **faith by what I do**. It's **not enough to see** and not do. This is a call to get caught up in something bigger than ourselves, in the call of God, in the work of God – by lending a **Hand**. Amen.