

Happiness in Youth and in Old-Age
Sermon for the 20th Sunday after Trinity
Sermon Text: Ecclesiastes 12:1-7



Remember also your Creator in the days of your youth, before the evil days come and the years draw near of which you will say, “I have no pleasure in them”;² before the sun and the light of the moon and the stars are darkened and the clouds return after the rain,³ in the day when the keepers of the house tremble, and the strong men are bent, and the grinders cease because they are few, and those who look through the windows are dimmed,⁴ and the doors on the street are shut – when the sound of the grinding is low, and one rises up at the sound of a bird, and all the daughters of song are brought low –⁵ they are afraid also of what is high, and terrors are in the way; the almond tree blossoms, the grasshopper drags itself along, and desire fails, because man is going to his eternal home, and the mourners go about the streets –⁶ before the silver cord is snapped, or the golden bowl is broken, or the pitcher is shattered at the fountain, or the wheel broken at the cistern,⁷ and the dust returns to the earth as it was, and the spirit returns to God who gave it.

When people are young, we would prefer to grow old quickly. Yet when we are older, we pay a lot of money so that we don't get any older. We especially don't want to look old and therefore pay a lot of money so that we look younger! That's how we are. The young people want to be old and the older people want to be young. We just don't want to be what we are now. And that's why we are always somewhat dissatisfied. Today, we hear an unusual passage from the Bible. The text comes from the book of Ecclesiastes and is a collection of wise words that provide practical advice for life. Today, the passage wants to explain how we can handle aging. However, it doesn't just address older people but also young people. It counsels young people to begin thinking about aging even when they are young; and it counsels older people to embrace aging. It counsels both to confront death because death overtakes young and old alike. The text explains in visual language what all happens realistically in old age. When it talks about the dimming of the light, it means that the person's memory is getting weaker.

When a person is older, they forget their passwords, even their own phone number, and they must carry around lots of notes so that they can still keep all their appointments. The keepers of the house the preacher talks about are the arms that are trembling now. When the trembling is bad, it's hard to hold a cup of coffee in hand without it all spilling out onto the floor. The bent strong men are the weak legs that must always be dragged behind and the teeth that have fallen out are like the grinders who can no longer grind the grain. The dimmed eyes are the people looking through the windows and the closed doors to the street are the ears that have become deaf. The croaking voice is barely understandable during the bird's song. Eventually, the entire life is like a broken bowl that is shattered and destroyed. This is no optimistic view of life for the future for people. Tina Turner, a successful world-renowned singer, wrote on her 80th birthday: "I have now reached the age at which I first need my dentures and my hearing aids to ask where my glasses are." We can laugh about such things and yet we are not happy about aging. But how do we handle it? Or is there nothing left but to enjoy life while you can?

The Preacher shocks us with his pictures about aging and yet at the end, he gives us a tip about how we can handle it. And in doing so, he takes the young people as well as the older people by the hand and leads them both to the grave. "Dust to dust; ashes to ashes." That is the fate of people. And it is also the last word that the Preacher writes as a summary of his entire book. But it doesn't stop there because he doesn't leave us standing at the grave, rather he takes us by the hand and leads us, not to the end, but to the beginning. The beginning is the creation of people. We remember that at the creation of people, God breathed His breath into Adam's nose. Only then did he become a person. Only through the living breath of God did man receive his destiny and purpose. He is created for God and should live for God. In the end, we only reach our destiny in God. The message of the Preacher applies both for older people and also for young people. He speaks to us both. In the end, we come back to God. That is our purpose! That is our joy! And that is our peace! That's why he calls to young and old people: Think about your Creator!

I said at the beginning that people are never satisfied with their age. When we are young, we want to be older and when we are old, we want to be young. This dissatisfaction refers not only to age but also to everything else. People are basically just dissatisfied. In a conversation with an older woman near Leipzig, she said: "We get upset about everything! We get upset about the youth, about the garbage disposal, about politicians...and we mostly get upset when we have nothing to be upset about!" We are a dissatisfied society and we complain a lot. The Preacher wants to keep us from this dissatisfaction. The word "dissatisfied" essentially means: "to not have peace." And the Preacher wants to keep us from this discontent. In his book, he collects many proverbs and wise words that are taken from life and have the intent of restoring peace. In the Old Testament, the word "peace" means more than just an absence of war. It means peace in the comprehensive sense. It includes the outer conditions in which we live as well as the mental peace which we feel in ourselves. In this sense, peace means becoming complete or whole! And that is exactly where the Preacher also wants to lead us. He wants us to draw from abundance in old age and youth. He wants us to be healed and to have peace. By showing us that we are essentially from God and must go back to God, he shows us that our peace, or our perfection, has its source in God. And we can experience this at any age and in every stage of life. We can call to God at any age and in every situation. "Bless the Lord, O my soul, and all that is within me, bless His holy name!" And when we can praise and thank God in every situation, we are at peace and it returns peace to the house! We can again be at peace even when we must search for our glasses with trembling hands and have forgotten the name of our grandchildren. The peace that the preacher

Solomon talks of it more than just an exercise and more than just a feeling. That's why he deliberately points to God. In God, peace is not a theory but a reality. This peace of God is indestructible – whether through age or sickness or hate or war. God doesn't just want to give us a peace that we can dream about or philosophize about. He wants the peace to be reality! He wants the peace to be tangible. In Jesus, this peace of God is not just theory but fact! Jesus walked God's path of peace here on earth so that peace might come to us. And on His way, Jesus shows us that His peace is indestructible and perfect. His path was a way of suffering. He was often hated and scorned. And right there it was clear that His peace is indestructible. His distinguishing features as a messenger of peace are His wounds that we inflicted upon Him. Under this Jesus and His cross, we are all gathered. Old, young, from East and West, we are gathered there and we will be embraced by him and be brought back to the living God. And God takes back what already always belonged to him! The peace of God be with you! Amen.