

TEXT: Psalm 24:1-6

THEME: THE EARTH IS THE LORD'S

¹ The earth is the Lord's, and everything in it, the world, and all who live in it; ² for he founded it upon the seas and established it upon the waters. ³ Who may ascend the hill of the Lord? Who may stand in his holy place? ⁴ He who has clean hands and a pure heart, who does not lift up his soul to an idol or swear by what is false. ⁵ He will receive blessing from the Lord and vindication from God his Savior. ⁶ Such is the generation of those who seek him, who seek your face, O God of Jacob.

Dear Christian Friends:

Materialism is the idolatry of worshipping material things, created things, rather than the Creator. It is the lie that filling our lives with lots of stuff will somehow bring us joy and happiness. It's the deception that these earthly treasures and pleasures will somehow last and not disappoint us. It is failing to put everything we have and everything we are into thankful service to God. It's thinking that we never have enough when we have more than we need. And the worst part about it is that it is so much part of our American experience that we don't even know we are doing it!

JOYFUL GENEROSITY BEGINS WITH A HEART THAT WORSHIPS GOD.
WE WORSHIP THE CREATOR AND NOT CREATED STUFF.

Psalm 24 begins with a bold statement. **"The earth is the Lord's, and everything in it, the world, and all who live in it; for he founded it upon the seas and established it upon the waters."** This is a simple truth. Everything in the world belongs to God, because he made it. We belong to God, because he made us. This church belongs to God, because he made it. Our houses, our cars, and our priceless collections of things we treasure belong to God, because the earth and everything in it belong to the Lord.

We don't like to accept this simple truth in our culture or in our sinful nature. We like to think that we own ourselves. Think of how many terms we have in our culture which contain the word "self." We have the right to SELF-DETERMINATION. That means we say we can choose whatever we want to do with our bodies. We take SELFIES, because we like looking at ourselves. We talk about SELF-ASSURANCE and SELF-AWARENESS and SELF-CONFIDENCE. We say that SELF-ESTEEM is important and we read SELF-HELP books and articles. When we focus our attention on ourselves, isn't that just another way of worshipping what is created instead of the Creator?

Our psalm continues. **"Who may ascend the hill of the Lord? Who may stand in his holy place? He who has clean hands and a pure heart, who does not lift up his soul to an idol or swear by what is false."** It says we should not lift up our souls, or our hearts, to an idol. I think there is a better translation. A better translation would be not to lift up our hearts to something that is inconsequential. It's putting our heart on something that is not the most important thing. Idolatry isn't so much that you love some evil thing or person. The really sneaky version of idolatry happens when we love good things too much.

Solomon was the wisest man on earth. He studied everything. He built things. He was the most successful king in the world at the time. He was rich with an annual income of 42 billion dollars. He denied himself no pleasure. But in the book of Ecclesiastes, he declares it all to be inconsequential, meaningless.

What are the inconsequential things in your life that you have lifted up your hearts to and worshipped instead of the God who created you? Is it your work? Is it your pursuit of pleasure? Is it your comfortable house? If we let the inconsequential things of this life become bigger than life, bigger than God in our life, we are missing out on the one thing that can bring real joy and meaning in our life.

And what's that? The only joy that will never disappoint us is the joy that we find in worshipping the God who not only made us and owns us, but who redeemed us for himself.

WE WORSHIP A GOD WHO HAS REDEEMED US FOR HIMSELF.

Sometimes people compare finding success in this life to be like climbing a hill. The problem is that most people don't know how to measure success, so they just keep on climbing. And they are climbing the wrong hill. Our psalm says: **"Who may ascend the hill of the Lord? Who may stand in his holy place? He who has clean hands and a pure heart, who does not lift up his soul to an idol or swear by what is false. He will receive blessing from the Lord and vindication from God his Savior. Such is the generation of those who seek him, who seek your face, O God of Jacob."**

The hill you want to climb to come into the presence of God is the hill that Jesus climbed. The words of the psalm might be better translated, **"He will receive blessing from the Lord and RIGHTEOUSNESS from God his Savior."** Through faith in Jesus, your Savior, you have everything you will ever need or want to make your life full and complete. You can stand before God because Jesus has dressed you in his righteousness. He became poor for your sake so that you might become rich in a way that billionaires will never experience. You are promised that you can have life and have it to the full. You can count yourself as a child of God. You have an inheritance that will never spoil or fade.

All the rest of the inconsequential stuff will fade away eventually. The movie star's beauty fades. The billionaire can't buy his way out of a hospitable bed. The athlete's strong body becomes weak and frail. The scholar who thought he knew everything cannot remember his children's names. But our faith in Jesus sustains us to the grave and beyond, to an inheritance that will never disappoint us.

Life doesn't have meaning because I can make myself rich. Life doesn't have meaning because I can sit on the beach and watch the sun set. Life has meaning when I know God as my Creator and Savior and when I find joy in serving him with all that I have and am. That's where JOYFUL GENEROSITY begins! Amen.

Prayer of the Church

Lord God, open our eyes to the beauty of your created world, and let us see you, the Creator, behind it all. You made all things to nourish our lives and to fill us with wonder and joy. Open our mouths to praise and thank you for your gifts and to worship you with joyful generosity.

Heavenly Father, when we are tempted to love and worship the things you have given us in this life, remind us that you are our highest joy. Do not let us enjoy the things of this world as ends in themselves, but rather let us use them almost absentmindedly, remaining focused on the full enjoyment of eternal life with you. As St. Paul wrote, “Those who use the things of this world” should only use them “as if not engrossed in them” (1 Corinthians 7:31). Keep our eyes fixed on you, without whom nothing brings any real or lasting joy.

Lord Jesus, you instituted the office of the public ministry and have given your people the privilege of extending calls to serve us through that ministry. Having asked for your help and guidance, Wisconsin Lutheran School in Racine, Wisconsin, has called Mr. Ryan Friske to serve them as a teacher and musician, which is how he serves us here at Trinity. We ask that as he prayerfully considers the two calls he now holds, you would guide him to a decision that is the best interest of your kingdom. As we await his decision, bless our congregation and its ministry so that your kingdom may continue to grow and flourish among us. We ask this in your name, for you are the Good Shepherd and head of the church. Amen.