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Sermon Text – Ecclesiastes 11:7-12:7

Pentecost 12 – God’s Word Prepares Us

*Your Word is a lamp to my feet and a light for my path. Amen.*

Dear friends in Christ,

An umbrella prepares you to go outside on a rainy day. Bug spray prepares you for venturing into a mosquito-filled woods. A life jacket prepares you if you should fall into dangerous water.

God’s Word, the Bible, **prepares** us for all the possible ups and downs, twists and turns of this life. Even more importantly, only God’s Word can prepare you for your greatest need at the end of life.

This is why Christian Education—teaching, hearing and learning God’s Word—is so important for *all ages*. Our lesson from Ecclesiastes helps us see how **God’s Word Prepares Us – For Life and Eternal Life**.

As part of what is often called “Wisdom Literature” in the Bible, the book of Ecclesiastes provides us with some very practical guidance for daily life, like this: **Yes, even if a man lives many years, in all of them let him find joy... Young man, be happy while you are a child, and let your heart make you glad during the days of your youth.**

Some people think that if you live a Christian life, you can’t have any fun. But here, as elsewhere the Bible tells us God wants us to make use of and enjoy the good blessings He gives to us in this life!

Now understand these verses are *not* to be twisted to say we should just go along with whatever evil desires come out of our sinful nature or embrace the sinful paths that the unbelieving world calls fun: like misusing God’s gift of sex outside of marriage, inappropriate entertainment, getting drunk, using illegal drugs, breaking the law, greed, lust and so on... For our lesson adds: **but know that for all these, God will bring you into judgment.**

We can’t call something fun if God calls it sin and we know that if we stubbornly and knowingly disobey God’s Word we are on our way to destroying our faith and headed for eternal punishment for hell.

Now it is also true, though, that God never gave his commandments to steal joy from life, but to protect the good blessings in which He wants us to **find joy**.

For example, if you don’t abuse drugs and alcohol, your health and life won’t be shattered by addiction. If you strive to live with contentment instead of never being satisfied unless you have more...then you can actually start to enjoy and appreciate what you do have as gifts of God instead of grumpily complaining you never have enough.

Letting God’s Word guide you on right paths will still give you so many wonderful ways to do this: **Walk down the roads on which your heart leads you and on the way your eyes see.** For example we can step outside on a beautiful summer day, look up from our phones and take in the wonders of God’s creation and see for ourselves what our lesson is talking about: **Light is sweet, and it is good for eyes to see the sun.**

Learning, travel, talking with friends, playing a game, pursuing a hobby, enjoying God's good gifts of food and drink in moderation and so much more lets us **find joy** in the life God gives us. And you know, it's even ok to smile in church! It's ok to be happy when we hear the Good News of Jesus' love for us!

**God's Word** also **prepares us**, for the joys of life protect us by warning us not to find our true meaning and purpose in the things of this world or just living for pleasure. For our lesson says: **Everything that is to come is vapor.**

This is a reoccurring phrase in Ecclesiastes. Like **vapor** from your moth on a cold day, or like fog that disappears as the sun rises, so the things of this world can quickly disappear and disappoint. So if we put our faith and hope in the things or people of this world instead of God, be it money, career, hobbies or even family, in the end they will not bring us lasting joy, because they will all disappear or we will!

**God's Word** also **prepares us for** the struggles of **life: Keep in mind the days of darkness, for they will be many.** My guess is we would mostly agree that we are living in such days right with the pandemic, upheaval and so much discord and disagreement in our nation, the newest challenge to our being able to teach children in person in our school, not to mention whatever personal **dark days** we face.

Yes, in a sinful world we will face many such days of disappointment, sadness and trouble. And yet our lesson also says: **Put frustration out of your mind, and ignore the troubles of your body.**

God's Word teaches us how to do this by teaching us where to go for help in trouble, like when 1 Peter tells us: **Cast all your anxiety on (God), because he cares for you.** So you **put frustration out of mind** (5:7) by directing your God-given faith toward the Lord's promises, looking to the Lord for strength, asking Him to help you through the difficulty and trusting His promise that He loves you, and that even when He permits trouble to come He has a good plan to do what is best for your eternal good.

The Old Testament of the Bible records how the Lord kept His people and His promises through countless dangers and upheld them through difficult days. The Lord promises to be with you and do the same for you in the book of Psalms, the Gospel of John, Romans, Revelation and all the rest. Yes, **God's Word Prepares us for life** – for struggles and challenges as it brings us God's own peace and comfort.

Most importantly, **God's Word prepares us for eternal life.** Our lesson starts to do that by reminding us we are mortal with a vivid picture of how our lives will end in decay and death, if they are not cut even shorter by accident or disease. It does this with the picture of a worn-down old house to describe the ravages of old age...

**When the watchmen of the house tremble...** this represents our hands that we use to take care of ourselves as we eat, drink, bathe, but in advanced age they now shake with weakness.

**The strong men are bent over...** the legs and back have **strong** muscles but become **bent** with age.

**The women who grind grain cease because they are few...** that is, teeth fall out and are few...

**Those watching through the windows can barely see...** a picture of fading eyesight, something many of us experience even at younger ages!

**The double doors to the street are shut... grows quiet:** hearing fading with age.

**A person wakes up at the sound of a bird...** as you can't sleep through the whole night...

**The almond blossoms become white...** Like hair, almond blossoms turn white before falling.

**Why? Because the man is heading to his eternal home... and the dust goes back into the ground... and the spirit goes back to God who gave it.**

Old age and death are *not* just part of some “circle of life” but are intruders into God’s good creation, they are the result of sin. These words recall the first chapters of the Bible where the first man and woman rebelled against God and suffered the consequences of sin and the Lord said: **you are dust and to dust you shall return** (Genesis 3:19). God formed the first human being from the dust of the earth and gave Him a living soul. Now sin means human bodies die and return to dust and the soul goes to God to be judged.

We are also such mortal sinners who will die. We are imperfect from the start of life and have not made perfect and thankful use of God’s earthly gifts. Instead we waste time and the blessings God gives us with sinful actions and sinfulness. The undeniable proof of our sinful imperfection is found in every ache and pain, graying hair, each cavity in our teeth and how quickly life passes toward death which is as impossible for us to stop or make whole as a **snapped cord, broken bowl or shattered jar**.

And this is why we need **God’s Word** most of all! For though our lives pass away like **vapor** and mist, yet **the Word of the Lord endures forever** (1 Peter 1:25)! And these Words of **everlasting life** hold the answer and antidote to sin and death.

In the words of our lesson, here is that answer: **So remember your Creator in the days of your youth**. We need to teach our children, teach the young about our **Creator** because we don’t know when death may come. Our lesson actually says it twice: **Remember your Creator**. This is what we need whether young or old, child or adult!

Now this is more than just **remember** that there is a God who made us, but to **remember** who He is and what He has done for you, what He tells you about Himself, most importantly the central message of His book: **God’s Word** teaches us what our **Creator** did to rescue us!

**Remember** the amazing mercy that the **LORD** showed to our whole human race after our first parents sinned. **Remember** God made a promise that He would do all the work that saves us from sin and death by giving us a perfect Savior—One who would be true and Eternal God and yet be born of woman, true Man to take our place and be the sinless substitute we need!

Jesus Christ, the Son of God and Son of Mary is that Savior who never wasted a moment of time, who always thanked God for His good gifts. Jesus never gave into sin and selfishness but lived in love and perfection to save us.

Jesus chose to take the death under God’s curse we deserved. On the cross, Christ endured far worse than the aches and pains and decay of old age. He suffered the curse of hell, abandoned by His Father in pain beyond our imagination to win forgiveness for all our sins. Jesus did this for you. Jesus did this for me. Trusting in Him, we will never have to experience the horrors of eternal death.

Instead, risen from the grave, Jesus lives to give us a life that does not end in decay and death. For Jesus who conquered death will bring the souls of His believing people safely through death to the **eternal home** He has prepared for us in the Father’s mansions.

Then at the resurrection He will reverse the “irreversible.” He will put together again and make whole again the **snapped cord, broken bowl and shattered jar** of our bodies raising them to endless life and glory like His own resurrected body! Through faith in Jesus we will experience the joy of heavenly bliss that will never fade away like temporary earthly joys. This is what God’s Word prepares us for by pointing our faith to Jesus Christ Alone!

Truly, all this makes Christian Education in all its forms—at school, church, and home so essential! For through **God’s Word**—His saving, faith creating and sustaining Word—our **Creator** and Savior **prepares us** not only **for life** with all its joys and challenges, but gives us **eternal life** through Jesus Christ. Amen.

*Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life. Amen.*