



ST. STEPHEN'S ANGLICAN CHURCH

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Sexagesima

Being the Second Sunday Before Lent, February 23rd, 2014

**✠ In The Name of The Father and of The Son
and of The Holy Ghost. Amen. ✠**

The Communion gospel begins: "A sower went out to sow his seed." This sower in 1st Century Judea was using a sowing technique called broadcasting. It's a trifle ironical I guess that broadcasting – one of the coolest occupations in today's highly secularized society derives its name from an ancient agricultural technique.

Actually, using the term "broadcasting" is remarkably appropriate. It is a technique by which a sower spreads an arc of seed evenly, and at an appropriate density, over as wide a stretch of land as possible. Radio and TV broadcasters aim for the same effect with the spoken word and pictures.

What's more, words and seeds share much the same fate. Some of them fall on good ground and produce fruit in abundance, but others fall by the wayside; or on rocks, or among thorns, And especially when it comes to the Word of God, an awful lot of it falls by the wayside, or on among thorns or on stony ground.

Every one of us – old or young, rich or poor – is susceptible to the distractions the world has to offer. Indeed, anything that distracts us from God's agenda and focuses

it in a different direction falls into the category of "the cares, riches and pleasures of this world."

Young people are particularly susceptible to being distracted by the riches and the pleasures bit – and not necessarily because they are particularly rich or that their lives are filled with pleasure.

Certainly, a pursuit of pleasure tends to be higher on one's list of priorities when one is young. But, especially for the young, pursuing pleasure and actually achieving it are two entirely different things.

Even when I was a kid the never-ending pursuit of total coolness was a constant distraction. Drain pipe trousers and draped jackets might seem a tad antique today. But in my day they were the height of cool. And if only I could have acquired such an outfit and – oh, rapture – a Tony Curtis haircut life would have been complete.

Sadly, my parents were dead against such things. And, strange to say, by the time I could afford to pay for such things myself, I discovered I really didn't want them at all. Fast cars, it turned out, were what truly

interested me. But amazing to relate, I couldn't afford them until I discovered I really didn't want them either.

That's the way "the cares and riches and pleasures of this world" work. They take your mind off the here and now and focus it on how much nicer everything would be if only you had something you haven't got. That "something" can be virtually anything – more time, more money, better health, better looks, better coordination.

Sometimes the cares and riches and pleasures of the world masquerade as virtues. Folks, for example, who single-mindedly pursue their careers, elevating their jobs to a position of supreme importance in their lives, often persuade themselves that they are making some sort of selfless sacrifice.

"I'm doing this for my family," they tell themselves. "I'm doing this to give them the things that I never had – a big house, nice cars, expensive toys, vacations in fashionable places and Ivy League educations for the kids." But truth to tell the real victim of the sacrifice is not the person pursuing the career, but the person's family.

The Prayer Book reminds us that God sets the solitary in families so that we may enjoy love and companionship in its most altruistic form. It is not accidental that the earthly family is the icon of the heavenly family. God is love and it's primarily in the family that we gain a glimpse of sort of altruistic love that binds the three divine persons of the Trinity together.

Families can get by just fine without big houses, big cars, fancy toys, vacations in Hawaii and Ivy League educations, but they can't get by when parents selfishly and single-mindedly do their own thing.

Ogden Nash wrote a poem contrasting sins of commission with sins of omission. He decided sins of commission were preferable to sins of omission because there was no fun in saying: "The next round of lapsed insurance policies is on me."

But while cares of this world are certainly no fun they just as distracting as riches and pleasures. Indeed, one can argue worrying is even more destructive habit than partying because it not only distracts you from God's agenda, but it also tends to undermine your faith in his providence.

People often confuse worrying with problem solving. There is, however, a world of difference between them. Agonizing about things over which you have no control is an utterly fruitless exercise.

"Which of you by worrying can add one cubit to the measure of your life?" Jesus asks. The answer is obvious: None of us can.

The cares and riches and pleasures of this world are destructive to us because they prevent us from enjoying – and using fruitfully – the only time we actually have at our disposal: the present; the here and now. The only time we can actually control is this instant. The instant before is lost forever. The next instant hasn't yet arrived.

This instant is the only reality available to us. Wasting it on strange fantasies, vain hopes and unrealistic expectations not only distract us from God, they hurt us by destroying our ability to enjoy the real life he has given us. And it is only by living our real lives to the full that we can bring forth fruit to perfection. *AMEN.*

To the Only Wise God, Our Saviour, be Glory and Majesty, Dominion and Power, Both Now and Forever. AMEN.