

## Sermon Reading: Psalm 24:1-6

*Of David. A psalm.*

<sup>1</sup> *The earth is the LORD's, and everything in it,  
the world, and all who live in it;*

<sup>2</sup> *for he founded it on the seas  
and established it on the waters.*

<sup>3</sup> *Who may ascend the mountain of the LORD?  
Who may stand in his holy place?*

<sup>4</sup> *The one who has clean hands and a pure heart,  
who does not trust in an idol  
or swear by a false god.<sup>[a]</sup>*

<sup>5</sup> *They will receive blessing from the LORD  
and vindication from God their Savior.*

<sup>6</sup> *Such is the generation of those who seek him,  
who seek your face, God of Jacob.*

### Sermon Theme: The Earth is the Lord's

It doesn't take too long in a young child's life to figure out that something belongs to them. It's pretty impressive how quickly a toddler picks up that phrase, "This is mine," without really being taught. As they continue growing up that teenager is quick to label things as, "My Stuff," and you better not touch it (to which mom and dad quickly remind them who bought or gave them their things). And that just keeps on going the older one gets. We probably all know of someone who is particular about their things and other people using them. Which makes sense; either they were given it or they worked hard for it, so they want their things to be treated well. I would be quite upset if I let you borrow my phone and I saw you using it like a hammer. But we aren't just talking about our things, possessions, our money; this includes our time and talents. For some, those are even more precious than the other. Wanting them to be treated well and used properly is all fine and good because God has made us responsible for these things and expects us to take good care of them. But who owns them? Who does it belong to? This is important because how we answer this question really determines how we view and then use our time, talents, and things.

Psalm 24 makes a very bold statement: "**The earth is the Lord's, and everything in it, the world, and all who live in it.**" David then goes on to explain how he can state this so strongly. Taking us back to Genesis 1 David shows God's creating hand that formed the formless and empty. In v.2 David writes, "**For he [the Lord] founded it on the seas and established it on the waters.**" Setting the foundations of the world and the cosmos, the Lord established the dry ground and formed what we call earth. Because God created the

world, the earth then belongs to him. This means that everything in the world, including all people who live in the world, belong to him too. This also means that everything that makes up the individual person, everything one has, everything a person is, everything they make ultimately belongs to the Lord as well.

And this is what we confess in the First Article of the Apostles' Creed. We confess: "*I believe in God the Father almighty, Maker of heaven and earth.*" And then maybe learned Luther's explanation in catechism class, when we say these words this means that we believe, "*God created me and all that exists, and that he gave me my body and soul, eyes, ears, and all my members, my mind and all my abilities.*" The one who created all things, who created me and all that exists, is the same God who also graciously gives those things to preserve our live: our clothing shoes, house home, and all we need to keep our body and life.

The problem comes when we forget this important truth. I'm not saying we forget this knowledge; but God's Word and studying it is not just an academic exercise. Where we fail is how we apply this truth to our lives. Instead of seeing all that we have—our time, talents, things, possessions—as favors and gifts from God, we may treat it as though we are doing a great service to God and favor to him with how we use them. So what Moses warned the Israelites in Deuteronomy against, we fall into. Our hearts quickly become proud and we forget the Lord saying to ourselves, "**My power and the strength of my hands have produced this wealth for me**" (Deuteronomy 8:17). You probably wouldn't say those exact words, but instead, we might say, "This is mine. I worked hard for it. I'm the one who put in the time and effort," and leave it at that. Which can lead to instead of worshiping and giving glory to the Creator, we worship and give glory to the created things—including ourselves. What we are talking about is materialism. It's 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. It's failing to put everything we have and everything we are into thankful service to God.

So instead of those gifts being used to the glory of God, they might be used to glorify self. And when this happens, then my time, my possessions, my money, my things are more important than yours. Instead of seeking to serve, we are fine with being served and other people doing things because I'm busy—everyone is busy, but my busyness is different from yours. We might be reluctant to use those gifts as God wants and expects because it feels like I have to give something up of my own. I don't trust that I'm going to receive anything in return—even a little recognition. I don't trust that it's going to be used as I see as best. And then even when we do use them to serve others, the motivation is too often stained with self-ambition—what can I get out of it—or it's done out of obligation and expectation—someone has to do it.

But the opposite could be true as well. Again, it's not just your money and possessions but your time and talents as well. But instead of glorifying self, those things might be a burden to you. One may try and play that dangerous comparison game and start to base your self-worth on how much you have compared to someone else. You may start to feel like a failure or a burden to others because you can't help out as much you want to or once were able to. Maybe you want to give more, but then you can't so you feel this burden on your conscience because you think someone expects more from you.

Either way, it makes it difficult for us to do as God designed. When God created the world he made it with a purpose. An architect doesn't sketch a building and leave it as an empty box; she will draw it with an intended purpose and design. When God created the world and everything in it, he made it with the intended purpose for creation to serve him and each other. But instead of worshipping and giving glory to him, man worshiped the created. Man wanted to believe he was the owner and that he knew what was best—which is worshipping the created, himself—and quickly the world and all after him was plunged into sin. You and I are still struggling with the same exact sin.

David asks the questions in v.3 of Psalm 24, **“Who may ascend the mountain of the Lord? Who may stand in his holy place?”** Too often it seems we are trying to go up the wrong hill so that we can be king of the mountain. One tries to climb the hill of success, financial stability, respected by their peers, talented in a certain field, having a certain amount of things. Understand that's not necessarily bad; striving for those is not wrong. But that's the sneaky thing about idolatry. When David writes about false gods in the next verse, it would be better translated as something that is inconsequential. Trusting or swearing by a false god then is putting our hearts on something that is not the most important thing. False gods and idols aren't just the false god of Baal or the idol of the golden calf in the Old Testament. It's anything that we place higher than God. It isn't so much that you follow some evil thing or person. The really sneaky version of idolatry happens when we love good things too much. Being and wanting to be successful isn't a bad thing; God wants us to use our talents to the best of our ability. It becomes bad when we love and strive after success too much and replace it as god. Having financial stability isn't a bad thing; in fact, God calls us to be good stewards and managers of money. But it becomes a bad thing when we become so focused on those numbers and love it too much. Same goes for our reputations, our things, our talents.

But those things aren't going to help you approach the Lord or stand in his holy place. The only way you can David says in v.4, **“The one who has a clean hands and a pure heart, who do not trust in an idol or swear by a false god.”** If you are trying to reach God by going up a different hill, it's not going to work. The requirement for being in God's presence is not by merely outward good actions and being a nice person. One must have clean hands and clean heart, pure both in deed and thought. But we know how dirty our

hands are with sin and rotten our attitudes can be. We know when we have been more focused on getting more and weren't content; how we've loved good things more than God. Don't fool yourself—God knows where your heart lies and whether or not you have been faithful.

As those things you possess did not come to you from earning or deserving it, you aren't able to climb up that hill or be in God's presence on your own either. And so God's Son climbed a different hill for you. Already before he founded this world on the seas and established it on the waters, before the foundation of this world was set, God chose you to be his own (Ephesians 1:4). Because he chose you, God sent his Son Jesus who is the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world and makes you clean. Jesus climbed that hill of Golgotha to be crucified on the cross and with the shedding of his blood, he has cleansed you and makes you as clean and white as wool. With his blood he has washed you of your sinful motivations and sinful actions, your misplaced priorities, your idol worship, and even your best intentions. Having done this, you are welcomed on God's holy hill where you receive blessing and righteousness—are cleansed of every sin—from God your Savior. It's that righteousness of Jesus you receive in baptism where God creates in you a clean and pure heart giving you a right spirit within you. Through the Word of the Bible God speaks to you so you know him and hear his voice. He draws you ever closer with the body and blood of his Son in the Lord's Supper to forgive your sins and strengthen your faith. And because he has given to us his Son, we have the confidence that God will continue to give every good thing (Romans 8:32) because he is our good merciful Father in heaven and not because we have earned or deserved it.

What a freeing truth this is. God doesn't need our stuff; it already belongs to him. We aren't doing him any favors; he's the one who gave you those things in the first place. And he gives them to us not just so that we can have them; he gives them to us to use, to be productive, to serve him and each other because there's nothing more to be done! Last week we talked about how God isn't interested in you trying to be a better person. That's because he has already made you perfect with the forgiveness of sins and making you a new creation in baptism. And now because he has saved us, because he has given us all these things, for all these gifts we ought to thank and praise, to serve and obey him. God gives you the gifts, the tools, and then the opportunity to use them for the work of his kingdom, to support the work leading others to him, to serve God, and your neighbor. The earth is the Lord's and everything in it; that includes you, me, and all that we have. Now I'm not saying we need to reply, "It belongs to God," every time someone asks, "Who does this belong to?" We don't need to because by your attitude and how you treat those gifts from God using them to serve him and each other, you show, "The earth is the Lord's." Amen.