

I'll have what s/he's having!

Isaiah 49:8-16; Psalm 131; 1 Corinthians 3:18-4:5; Matthew 6:22-34

What takes our attention?

Today's gospel reading speaks very loudly and clearly to our society today. The eye is truly the lamp of body. What is our eye on? Where is our focus? *Where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.* (Matt 6.21) That verse comes just before today's reading in Matthew's gospel. Whatever you deem to be treasure is where your heart, your attention and your eye will be.

This relates quite closely to Trish's recent words about Plan A and Plan B, the desires of the heart, and God's righteousness. The choice of focus, of the eye and the heart, is always God or something else. That other something will vary from person to person and from time to time for a particular person. Where our treasure lies may come from our own desires of the heart but increasingly it is also the product of skilful and sustained advertising. The gospel passage does not talk about whether you will be able to eat or have something to wear, but about worrying about what that something might be.

Matthew's gospel tells us what people in those days commonly held as the other, not God, focus of attention – food, drink, clothes. It's not so different today.

It could be argued that people in our society, and other societies as well, have great difficulty in finding a healthy, functional relationship with food and other consumer goods.

You know those *Eternity* newspapers that appear at the back of the church from time to time? I was reading in one some time back that in modern western society the classic sin of gluttony has re-surfaced as excessive particularity. Eating an excessive amount of food is still around and we are encouraged to do that more and more. Look at the changes in portion sizes. I am hard pressed to think of any food item that now comes in a smaller size than it did. It's big, bigger and biggest!

There is a limit to how much we can consume, so now we are also encouraged to prefer one variety over another, not through need or

nutrition but through particularity. You really, really must try this particular thing which comes in so many different flavours or is bigger, better, smaller, cooler, rarer, more desirable in every way.

This doesn't just apply to food. Think of clothes, cars, almost any consumer good. You are being tempted to think of the source, brand, detailed features, rarity, being more expensive, or otherwise unattainable by others. It's no longer even enough to covet your neighbour's xxxx, you just must have one that excites covetousness in your neighbour! I particularly dislike the car ad with the little boy who pastes a life-sized drawing of the neighbour's car over the car in his own driveway.

The popular media is a very useful barometer of inappropriate obsession. There are repeated and ever more strident messages about what other people would like to be the priorities of our lives.

What about me? It isn't fair. I don't have enough I want...I want... I want...

Why? Because you deserve it!

I'll have what she's having.

The desires of our hearts

But we can't just blame advertising. Advertising homes in on, and builds on, the desires of our hearts.

“We humans are enflashed yearning. St Augustine said it well at the start of his Confessions, ‘God, you have made us for yourself, and our hearts are restless till they find their rest in you.’ We constantly desire more, and better, and different.”

(<http://www.liturgy.co.nz/reflection/632b.html>)

We do need material things- we need to eat, drink, wear clothes, buy gifts etc and we can certainly have preferences and priorities. That's OK. We can do that. But when those things are what we worry about, what eats at us, what makes us dissatisfied with having perfectly fine things that were what we wanted not so long ago, then something is very wrong.

You can't serve God and money. We often think of this as the pursuit of money but it can also be obsessing about how we earn or spend that money. These things are a wrong choice of focus. *Seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well.*

What do we really want and need in our lives? Putting God first will bring us to those things. God is the ultimate “more and better and different” from the things of this world.

Relationship with God

Its epidemic to be so busy with work or other things that we lack time to build relationships with people let alone with God.

It is difficult to build strong relationships without shared time. Quantity of time and quality of time both matter but each individual must find the balance they need.

How do you nurture your relationship with God? What works for you in your times with prayer, Scripture, worship? How will you build up this important aspect of your life? If I do not have enough time and energy for my relationship with God, then that is when *it isn't fair. I don't have enough. I want my share.* Why? Because my relationship with God deserves it. It is the foundation of my life. And yours!

In a recent movie the hero discovers the joy and the intense feeling of belonging that come when he flies his dragon-like ikran. He says, *I may not be much of a horse guy, but I was born to do this.*

We are born to live in relationship with God. From that relationship with God come our relationships with our neighbours – our family and friends, and those we meet in our daily life.

Calm, quiet and content

When we have a loving relationship with God and with our neighbours, we are like the people of Israel, restored after the great exile. Our hearts are no longer constantly yearning for what we do not have but are peaceful and content. *I have calmed and quieted myself, I am like a weaned child with its mother; like a weaned child I am content. Israel, put your hope in the LORD both now and forevermore.* (Ps 131.2-3)

Of course, we must be careful in judging the restlessness of the heart that we are examining our own hearts. We cannot judge the hearts of others. We do not really know why and how their choices are made, let alone the state of their relationships with God and their fellow human beings. Well, sometimes we think we know if they boast of particular choices.

Paul says, ⁵ *Therefore judge nothing before the appointed time; wait until the Lord comes. He will bring to light what is hidden in darkness and will expose the motives of the heart. At that time each will receive their praise from God.*

Mission/evangelism

From this basis of investing time and energy into our relationship with God, and subsequently with our neighbour, we can also come together in that relationship, and make our church a mutually supportive, thriving, mission-focused community – a community which does not envy or covet what we see in others, but seeks to share what we have in Christ.

Mission is an outpouring of what we want for our neighbours. And what do we really want for our neighbours – those we love and those we come across in daily life? If they are thinking *I want what she's got* or *I want what he's got*, will it be about consumer goods or about the life of Jesus that shines through our lives?

So, what does fulfil our heart's desire? What brings us ultimate peace and contentment?

We need to be a people who are different from the crowd, not because what we have is rare or expensive or unattainable but just the opposite. It is both infinitely more valuable and is offered freely and with love – something “more, better, different”, both desirable and attainable.

Closing Prayer

Let us pray that we may grow in union with the One who fulfils our heart's desire.

Almighty God,
you have made us for yourself,
and our hearts are restless
till they find their rest in you;
so lead us by your Spirit
that in this life we may live to your glory
and in the life to come enjoy you for ever;

through Jesus Christ our Lord
who is alive with you and the Holy Spirit,
one God now and for ever.

Amen.

(NZPB p. 632b)