

Cathedral Mattins 24th February 2019

Ps 147.13-end; Gen 1.26-31; Matt 6.25-end

May I speak in the name of the living God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Amen

Are we at peak stuff? That was a question posed by a broadcaster on Radio 4 recently, as she looked at the growing movement in our society away from buying more stuff towards having less, and using what we have more efficiently. This move away from consumerism may be driven by necessity – many people today simply don't have the money, or the space, to acquire things which are not essential. But it seems also to be driven by a growing awareness of our position – our responsibility - in the global chain of events. If I buy more stuff, what might be the provenance - unethical conditions of employment, perhaps, causing misery for thousands of vulnerable people? And what might be the effect down the line - more greenhouse gasses – more plastic molecules in the ocean - more items for landfill?

So when we're considering getting more stuff, there is a growing influence to consider not just whether we like it, and want it, and whether we can afford it. We are being encouraged to consider whether we *should* buy it – to consider whether we are being good stewards of all the wonderful things we have been given.

This movement towards good stewardship of the earth's resources resonates with the creation story. We are all made in God's image. We are all made to be caretakers and trustees of the animals and the rest of God's creation. And we are all made to be in relationship with God, and to enjoy his love for ever.

The Christian message is, more than anything, about being loved. If my Father loves me but he is short of resources, I might worry about being provided with what I need. And if my Father has endless resources but does not love me, I might also worry about being provided for. But the creation story tells us that God created all the good things on this earth and gave them to us, with his

blessing, to use and to look after. *For every wild animal of the forest is mine, says God, the cattle on a thousand hills ... If I were hungry, I would not tell you, for the world and all that is in it is mine.* [Ps 50.10,12]

So do not worry about your life, what you will eat or what you will drink, or about your body, what you will wear ... Can any of you by worrying add a single hour to your span of life? [Matt 6.25.27]

This message may seem insensitive, even heartless, to the countless millions struggling to stay alive day after day, destitute and hungry. But these are the words of an itinerant preacher with no material security, who shared life's daily struggles with his family, his friends and his community. These are the words of Jesus who so cared about people's need for food, shelter and safety that he fed the 5,000, healed the sick and calmed the life-threatening storm. He knows that what we will eat and what we will wear and everything else about our physical, mortal life is important.

So what is Jesus forbidding and what is Jesus demanding? It is not prudence and foresight which Jesus forbids – that is in keeping with the good stewardship required of us as people made in God's image. It is *worry* which Jesus forbids. Worry is essentially distrust of God. Worry denies the everlasting and unconditional love which God has for the people he has made. Worry refuses to learn the lesson of history – the record of what God has done. Worry refuses to learn the lesson of life.

In the days of Moses, the children of Israel grumbled against the Lord, despite being delivered from slavery and given their freedom in a new land. Moses challenged them, *I call heaven and earth to witness against you today that I have set before you life and death... Choose life, loving the Lord your God, obeying him and holding fast to him... for the Lord is your life.* [Deut 30.19-20]

So do not worry about your life, what you will eat or what you will drink, or about your body, what you will wear... for your heavenly Father knows that you need all these things.

And our heavenly Father knows that all these things are still not enough – not enough to satisfy our search for meaning, our soul's hunger and thirst – not enough to give us the inner peace we crave – not enough to give us the deep

fulfilment of abundant life – for the Lord himself *is* that abundant life. We need to know that God is with us and for us always. We need to know that nothing – nothing – can separate us from the love of God in Jesus Christ. God has everything we need, and is longing to give it to us, if only we can open our hands and our eyes and our hearts and our minds and *receive* from him.

The Christian message is, more than anything, about being loved. The American poet Raymond Carver died 30 years ago aged 50 after a hard, tumultuous and tortured life that – once he got sober – offered him just a decade of peace and love. His last poem is his epitaph:

And did you get what you wanted from this life, even so?

I did. And what did you want?

To call myself beloved, to feel myself beloved on earth.

Nothing can separate us from the love of God in Jesus Christ. The loving gift of God through Jesus is that we become remade, conformed into his likeness; we receive God's righteousness and are restored to his image in us. If we suffer hardship, sickness, dispossession, has God stopped loving us? Has God broken the deal? No – the deal is that we seek his righteousness, and God is with us and for us and loving us always. He himself is our life.

If we choose to put our trust in him, and put our hand into his hand and let him lead us, nothing is ever going to keep us from feeling beloved on this earth.

There is deep happiness in finding what we were made for. We sense God's relaxed pleasure in the lilies of the field and the birds of the air; how much more does he want to love us and enjoy us, forever?

Sermon by Linda Barratt, Cathedral Reader.