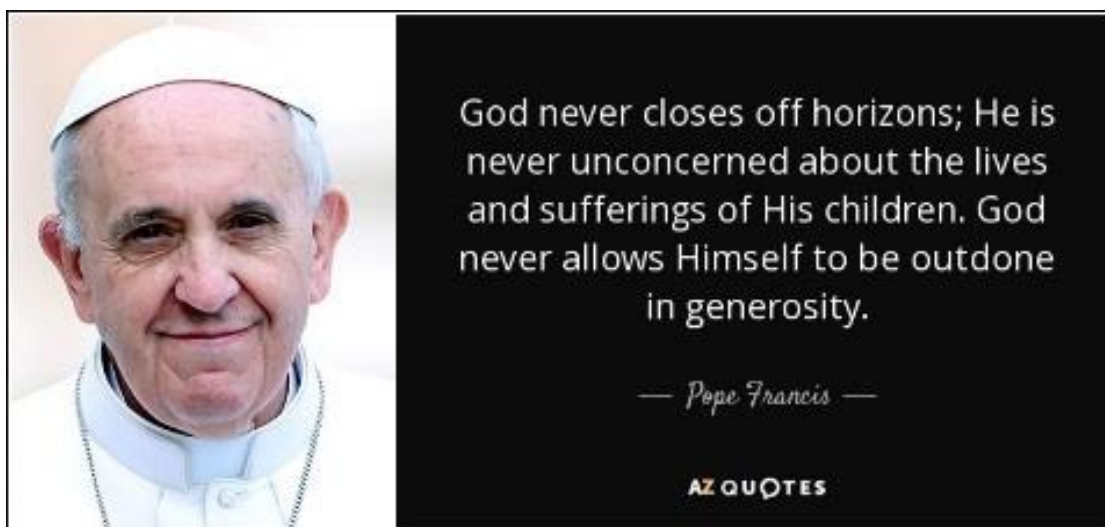


Masterclass – Trust

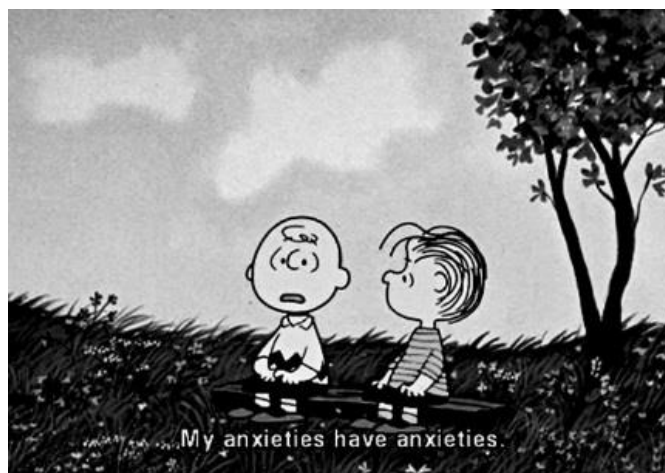
Luke 12:22-34 (NIV) – Do Not Worry

²² Then Jesus said to his disciples: “Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat; or about your body, what you will wear. ²³ For life is more than food, and the body more than clothes. ²⁴ Consider the ravens: They do not sow or reap, they have no storeroom or barn; yet God feeds them. And how much more valuable you are than birds! ²⁵ Who of you by worrying can add a single hour to your life? ²⁶ Since you cannot do this very little thing, why do you worry about the rest? ²⁷ “Consider how the wild flowers grow. They do not labour or spin. Yet I tell you, not even Solomon in all his splendour was dressed like one of these. ²⁸ If that is how God clothes the grass of the field, which is here today, and tomorrow is thrown into the fire, how much more will he clothe you—you of little faith! ²⁹ And do not set your heart on what you will eat or drink; do not worry about it. ³⁰ For the pagan world runs after all such things, and your Father knows that you need them. ³¹ But seek his kingdom, and these things will be given to you as well. ³² “Do not be afraid, little flock, for your Father has been pleased to give you the kingdom. ³³ Sell your possessions and give to the poor. Provide purses for yourselves that will not wear out, a treasure in heaven that will never fail, where no thief comes near and no moth destroys. ³⁴ For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.

Let’s clear up a couple of things about this passage from the get-go. Firstly, Jesus is not inviting us to become unconcerned about the world in which we live, to close our eyes and not to worry about things around about us. Because Jesus is all about engagement with the needs of the world, clothing the naked, feeding the hungry, healing the sick and visiting people in prison (Matthew 25:41-45). As Pope Francis recently said; “God never closes off horizons; He is never unconcerned about the lives and sufferings of His children. God never allows Himself to be outdone in generosity”.



Secondly, this passage is also not saying that if you suffer from anxiety, if you habitually worry, you are a bad Christian and you lack faith, and I say this because I have heard Christians use this passage in exactly this way. Jesus understands perfectly what it is like to live with anxiety. One of his best friends Martha, was chronically anxious and he didn't judge her he just wanted to heal her. On one occasion, when Martha's anxiety was getting the best of her Jesus turned to her and said kindly:



⁴¹ "Martha, Martha," the Lord answered, "you are worried and upset about many things, ⁴² but only one thing is needed. Mary has chosen what is better, and it will not be taken away from her." (Luke 10:41-42)

Now today's message is not really about anxiety but it is worth spending a moment or two recognising that "the one" that is needed when you are suffering anxiety is spending time in the presence of Jesus, like Mary was doing. The one thing that we need when we are anxious, is to spend time in prayer. Paul gives exactly the same advice; He says:

⁶ Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. ⁷ And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus. (Philippians 4:6-7)

I have discovered over the years that praying as Paul suggests with a spirit of **thanksgiving**, brings peace to my anxious mind. I have also discovered that when I don't pray with a spirit of thanksgiving but with a spirit of a whole lot of winging, then I become more anxious than when I began. If that is speaking to you today then it might be helpful if we get together sometime and talk about anxiety. But let's get back to our passage.

To understand what Jesus is talking about we simply need to recognise who Jesus is speaking to and the challenges that these people are going to face in the future. Luke makes it very clear in verse 22 that Jesus is now talking very specifically to the 12 disciples who in the near future are going to be dealing with a whole bunch of challengers. We need to remember that Luke wrote this gospel and he also wrote the story of the early church and Luke regularly connects the things that Jesus taught with how things worked out in the early church.

These disciples are going to be the core leadership of a new movement set in motion by Jesus to establish the kingdom of God. That task, just in itself will be extremely challenging. Additionally this group of people will come under significant social and economic pressure. As a group of **Jewish** people who will commit themselves to a life that most other **Jews** will see as betraying Judaism, they will become increasingly ostracised. People will not do business with them, they will have increasingly less and less income. So there were days when the disciples were wondering two things,

when is this kingdom going to kick in and what are we going to do for money? There will be days - you know those days, when you look at your balance sheet and your bank account and you see that you are going backwards, and this fear kind of grips you by the throat and you go to God and ask - aren't you supposed to be helping me with this?

There will be days, and Jesus is speaking to the disciples about those days, and he is saying to them, in those days trust me! If you put the Kingdom first I will look after you. Little flock, I will give you the kingdom, yes there will be days, when you will wonder if it is ever going to come together, but little flock You need to trust me if you are going to get through what you are going to go through.

So having spoken at length about trust, considering how God looks after ravens and lilies, Jesus then asks the disciples to trust him with a truly radical request. He says, this is what I want you to do, sell everything you own and give the money away, don't even invest it, just give it to people in need. I want you to do this because it will commit your heart to the kingdom, because where your treasure is, that's where your heart is, and I need you to be focussed and trusting, if this task I have set you is going to come to fruition.

When I read this passage there is a part of me that is utterly thrilled that I am called to a cause that is so significant that it is worth big sacrifices. However, at the same time I am some-what hopeful that Jesus is not making this specific request to me personally because it's a big ask, you know what I mean? Over the centuries there have been followers of Jesus who have given away all their material possessions and lived lives of simplicity and poverty, serving the kingdom because they believed that Jesus was directly asking them to do that and biblically I cannot fault that decision. However the rest of the New Testament is telling me that the Jerusalem church took this command of Jesus to sell everything' as a personal request specifically for them.

Luke records that the Jerusalem church did sell all their assets and gave away the proceeds (Acts 2:45). Then Paul records in Galatians 2 and elsewhere that stripped of its assets the Jerusalem church became impoverished and so Paul personally collected money from other churches for the Jerusalem believers. (See also Rom 15:25-33, 1 Corinthians 16:1-4, 2 Corinthians 8:1-9, 15).

This incidentally is the first record of charity fund raising in the history of the world, such things were unheard of in the ancient world. What is also of interest is that almost all of Pauls teaching on generous giving is mostly about this collection and rarely about giving to the local church, which is the way these passages are sometimes used even by me. So when we raise funds for our neighbours in Zimbabwe let's remember that we are standing in an extremely honourable biblical tradition.

But the main point we need to drill down to at the moment is that while generosity and caring for the poor was a universally encouraged value in the life of the early church (Acts 9:36, 10:4, 31, James 2:3-6), after Acts 5, selling everything for the common good is not generally practiced in the church. So it does seem that Jesus command to sell their possessions and give to the poor was considered by the early church to be a specific and unique command for the Jerusalem Christians.

Which makes sense when you recognise that the Jerusalem church faced a specific and unique challenge. Jesus had warned the first Christians that Jerusalem would be attacked and destroyed and he pleaded with them that they should flee when that time came.

²⁰ *"When you see Jerusalem being surrounded by armies, you will know that its desolation is near. ²¹ Then let those who are in Judea flee to the mountains, let those in the city get out, and let those in the country not enter the city.*
(Luke 21:20-21)

The historian Eusebius recorded that: *"The whole body, however, of the church at Jerusalem, having been commanded by a divine revelation, given to men of approved piety there before the war, removed from the city, and dwelt at a certain town beyond the Jordan, called Pella."* (Ecclesiastical History, tr. C. F. Crusè, 3d ed., in Greek Ecclesiastical Historians, 6 vols. (London: Samuel Bagster and Sons, 1842), p. 110 (3:5).)

So you see, the number one reason why people who should flee from coming disasters often do not flee, is that they don't want to leave their homes and their assets. Therefore, the Jerusalem Christians having been obedient to Jesus, having sold their homes and assets and given away all the proceeds, when they see Roman armies moving to attack Jerusalem what is preventing them from fleeing? – Nothing –so they were free to leave and they were saved because they trusted Jesus and they were obedient to his command.

If that is how God clothes the grass of the field, which is here today, and tomorrow is thrown into the fire, how much more will he clothe you, O you of little faith! (Luke 12:28)

But seek his kingdom, and these things will be given to you as well.
(Luke 12:31)

I will look after you says Jesus, trust me, you just make the main thing the main thing, just keep your focus on following me and doing what I ask. Well Jesus that is not always easy, there are lots of good reasons to back away from selling your possessions, number one being I've got a family, what are they going to live on? You say don't worry about that I'll look after you, but that's a hard call. What if it doesn't work out? What if my children suffer? What about my wife? I know, you say, don't worry, trust me. Well that's easy for you to say Jesus, you're comfortable with being poor and you're single, you don't have a family to worry about. But then again you knew that you were going to be arrested, and tortured and killed for the sins of every man woman and child on the planet, and you trusted your father God, and if you hadn't trusted Him, and if you hadn't done what he asked you to do, we would all be lost and without hope and without God in the world (Ephesians 2:12).

So this is the equation as I see it, if we don't trust Jesus, and if we don't do the radical thing that he calls us to do from time to time, then someone most likely is going to miss out on an opportunity for being saved, or healed, or loved because, we counted the cost, we didn't like the sums, so we sat on the fence and couldn't put the kingdom first.

The gospel is a radical cause for radical transformation and it requires from time to time a radical trust and obedience from us, his people. It can look like sacrificing income, and financial security, trusting Jesus in order to serve people around the globe. But it can also look like a mum willingly sacrificing desperately needed down time to help a neighbour who has a sick child. It can look like giving up making that hard won appointment because you saw an elderly woman trip and fall and hurt herself and you were the only one around to help her. It can look like bringing your kids to church and bringing your kids to God through prayer week in and week out, even when it becomes really hard and discouraging because there is so many competing things going on in your lives, but you are going to keep on seeking the kingdom for your children and trust Jesus for the rest. It can look like just turning up, turning up to help your neighbour who is a king-sized pain in the rear-end, but you heard clearly from God that you are to keep knocking on this man's door because there is something that God wants to do in his life, and you have to trust Jesus to get through some totally uncomfortable moments. It can look like just about anything, we just have to be focussed on the Kingdom and trusting in our living.

I just want to finish this up with a reminder of how incredibly wonderful is the kingdom we are to put first and trust Jesus for.

This is Daniel Smith, one of the most precocious talents on the Australian swimming scene. As a 14 year old Smith won eight national titles in the single greatest gold medal haul since Ian Thorpe who he was being compared with by just about everyone. In the eyes of his legendary swim coach, Denis Cotterell, Smith was the best talent and the best trainer he'd encountered since he'd coached Grant Hackett.



And then the wheels started falling off. Smith thought fame and fortune would fall in his lap and behaved like he was a rock star when in fact he'd proven nothing at all and internally he was more than a little lost, and began to deal with that lost-ness with every increasing quantities of alcohol and drugs and until they took over his life. "I thought I would be OK, I'd just use a little bit of drugs here and everything would be alright, but really it literally destroyed my life. "I was a very empty, lost and broken boy," Smith told sports organisation Passion for Sport and reflected on his drug and alcohol addiction, describing it as an attempt to "fill a void."

Smith spent five years in a very broken wilderness, hurting everyone around him and particularly his family who he loved dearly, but he was completely out of control. Describing his lowest point, he said, "I didn't want to be alive anymore." He became homeless and eventually spent time in a facility for alcohol and drug rehabilitation before returning to swimming in 2014. It was during this time that Smith decided he needed to trust God and is very clear today that trusting God was the most important step on his way back. It was only after coming to Christ that he felt the void was filled, "that's what He's done – He's filled me from the inside out."

Daniel won selection in the Rio swim team and swam in the final of the 4x200 men’s relay that finished an agonising 4th just 0.68 off the podium. Here we see Daniel Smith, Jacob Hansford and Mack Horton with Thomas Fraser-Holmes in the water.



Despite the accolades that come with being an Olympian, Smith recognises he isn’t defined by his sporting achievements. “Swimming isn’t who I am, it’s just what I do. “I’m a vessel of the Holy Spirit, God loves me – it’s taken me a bit of time to really realise that. “God doesn’t need gold medals and stuff, he cares more about my character and what’s on the inside,” he said.



Daniel’s trust in Jesus has turned his life around, once he was lost, and now he is found and the Australian swimmer is now hoping to use his story to inspire others. “I want to be able to go out there and actually give others hope that you can do this and look what I’ve done with my life.”

Looking ahead to Tokyo 2020, Smith is optimistic. "With the Lord, I guess the sky's the limit with my Olympic journey and my swimming," he says. "I'm just more driven than ever, more focussed, and I'm just really excited about my future now."

Seek first the Kingdom of God, because the kingdom of God is the most life giving cause on the face of the earth, and Jesus promises to look after those who follow his radical call.

