

The Full Life

Luke 12:22-34

Every day Kate, our office administrator, brings in the Herald Sun newspaper. Friday is the day I look forward to the most. Why? That's the day that the carsGuide section appears. Then there's the Drive section in the Saturday Age. And the welcome sight of Wheels magazine in my letterbox in the middle of each month.

By now you're probably getting a sense that I have an interest in cars. Probably more than an interest, perhaps an obsession. I devour all the news about the latest model released on the market. I know all the specifications and statistics. Perhaps I shouldn't be surprised that when I've actually bought a car, I know far more about it than the person I'm buying it from.



As I read through carsGuide on Friday morning (for the purpose of sermon research, of course), almost every page contained multiple adverts for Melbourne car dealers. Buy a car and win \$20,000 cash! 2.9% p.a Comparison Rate finance if I buy a Ford, or a Nissan, or a Toyota. Free 5 Year Extended Warranty if I buy a new Honda. Wait a moment. Isn't my Honda already seven years old? Isn't it time to trade into something new and shiny? It would make sense to have a car that's under warranty. And aren't I getting sick of driving a black car?

That's what goes on in my head constantly. Advertising has done its proper work: to make me dissatisfied with what I have and to convince me that buying something new would improve my life. Our consumer society is based on creating a need, even if the need isn't real, and holding up a product as the solution to that need. Mark Sayers in his book, *The Trouble with Paris*, notes that we live in a culture "that 3-5000 times a day offers us a perfect reality if we buy the right services or product." He doesn't call this consumerism, but hyper-consumerism. "Who would be interested in spirituality," he says, "when our lifestyle offers us everything that we could want?" And yet we have to work so very hard to maintain this lifestyle, and to milk everything out of life that we can: every product, every experience that will validate us in the eyes of others.



"You may not get an interesting job-after all, not everyone can-but you can moderate the anger and sadness at missing out by buying hard, by acquiring goods that describe you and how you live your life."

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.
 FOR LIFE IS MORE THAN FOOD, AND THE BODY MORE THAN CLOTHES.
 LUKE 12:22-25

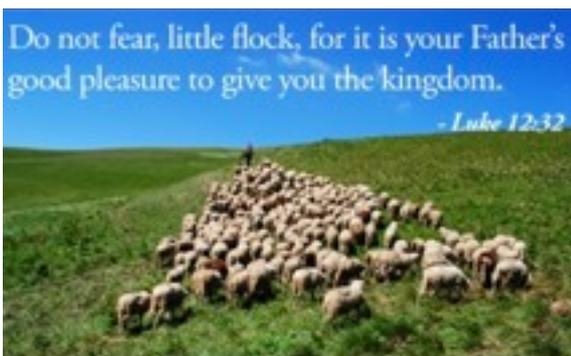
Jesus said to his disciples: “Therefore, I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat; or about your body, what you will wear.” Jesus has just spoken about the cost of following him. Persecution will come, and that will test his disciples’ resolve, their courage and their trust. They will know what it’s like to have to rely on the risky generosity of others, and to face going hungry and thirsty.

How do we hear these words of Jesus? We know what it’s like to worry. But aren’t our worries of a different kind. We are not worried about whether we will eat and drink, but what, and how what we eat or drink communicates something about our tastes, or about how we wish to be seen by other. Perhaps Jesus would rightly say to us, “Do not worry about your lifestyle...”

But we do worry. Not about the necessities of life in most cases, but about the way that the things we have reinforce our sense of self, or build up our image in the eyes of others. We are anxious, Sayers observes because “the more we try to ground our identities in external possessions or triumphs, the more we plaster our names on everything we can accumulate, the more we cling to surface and style, the less we find underneath.”

Jesus uses an interesting word for worry in verse 29: “Do not set your heart on what you will eat and drink: do not hover/waver/be suspended in mid-air about these things...” Jesus captures the space Christians inhabit in a consumeristic culture. We know the lies that it spins, lies to entice us away from trust in the God who considers us the most precious beings in all creation. We know deep down that the things we have don’t make us happy. In fact, often the very opposite is true. They become a burden because they come to define who we are. Thieves do come near and moths do destroy. Shiny new things lose their lustre, and with them the power of these possessions to communicate a positive message about us also diminishes. Just like my two less than shiny, somewhat dented and very much used cars. What do people think of me? “The pagan world runs after these things...” and if I’m honest, so do I. Who and what do I really believe to be true about life?

“Who of you by worrying can add a single hour to your life?” The answer to the question is obvious, but the answer is painful. None of us. Worry is clearly corrosive to trust in God’s care and provision. It throws us back on our own resources, because we discount the caring hand of God. We become blind to the many blessings he continues to pour out every day, not just on us but on all people: the sunshine and the rain, the natural environment, food and clothing, work and family, good order even despite our dissatisfaction with our political leaders. Worry and thanks are polar opposites.



Jesus calls both ancient and contemporary disciples back to the core truth: the kingdom of God. “Do not be afraid, little flock, for it has pleased your Father to give you the kingdom.” Here Jesus speaks as our good shepherd. He is the one who lays down his life for us, his sheep. He knows us. He will never abandon us. His cross is the clearest evidence for this claim. He comes to counter all the thieves in our lives that “come to steal and kill and destroy.” worry about

what we do or don't have, anxiety about how our lives, or indeed our lifestyles, measure up against others, the concern about how our possessions will last the distance. Instead, he says, "I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full."

This life is kingdom life. It's the gift of a relationship with the creator of the universe, our creator, the God who has called us by name in our baptism, and who there has also renamed us as his children, and brothers and sisters of his Son, Jesus Christ.



It's on this basis that Jesus speaks these words of challenge: "Sell your possessions and give to the poor. Provide purses for yourselves that will not wear out..." Decisions we make about what we own indicate whether we see them as gifts of God or as blessings from God's hand that we can share with others. Every decision we make in life gets down to the same basic question: who or what do we trust? Our attitude toward our money and possessions is a clear signal about where we place our faith. Being generous and giving to others is a sign of disentanglement from our stuff, and an opening up toward the God whose kingdom gift is the most precious thing we have. In giving things

away, we show trust that God will continue to provide for us. Not only that, but we participate with God in caring for his creation. We partner with God in sharing his love for the world. We witness to others of the new reality that shapes our lives, "a treasure in heaven that will never fail," and which counters all of our anxiety and worry about the things we have.

Late last year I was praying for God to give me a verse that would act as a template for the ministry life of St Paul's in 2013. This is what I believe God gave me. "Give, and it will be given to you. A good measure, pressed down, shaken together and running over, will be poured into your lap. For with the measure you use, it will be measured to you." (Luke 6:38) May God give us a renewed appreciation of the treasure he has given us, in his good pleasure: his kingdom, the life of his Son Jesus, his good gifts of body and soul. May he teach us to be rich toward him and others. Amen.

