

Loose Change? Pentecost 8 - 28 July 2022

I have always thought that the question, "Do you have any loose change?" - was rather silly, as the people you seem to ask it of tend to have a grip on their change as tight as a clam, and parting them from it may require some sort of upper limb amputation.

But change is not only of the pecuniary sort; and in a paradoxical way, we are often as reticent to accept the other sorts of change in our lives, as we are to let go of the looneys, twoneys, and quarters in our sweaty little hands.

Obviously, with the words of the gospel still resonating in your ears, you will be thinking that I am referring to the rich man whose soul

was demanded of him the same night he had finished counting his piles of cash - but I'm not thinking of that at present, and because I don't expect you to be clairvoyant, I will enlighten you as to the vagaries of my current cerebral synaptic activity. (Where the hell did he dream up that kind of rubbish?, you must be thinking - yes, I'm a bit worried about it as well!)

Whether we like change in our lives or not, it's going to happen. Sometimes we cannot wait for it, and sometimes we want to put it off for as long as possible.

Watching our grandsons growing up, I have seen as Ben, the eldest, is now taller than his

mother, and will probably be taller than me in a couple more weeks. His voice has broken this year, and if he's anything like I was at almost 14, he'll be gradually be losing his passion for his baseball bat in favour of something altogether softer, more curvy, more challenging, and infinitely more dangerous.

God explains through Hosea how hurt God was by Israel's unfaithfulness to him, and why he rejected them at the start of the book that we read last week. Here we see God's mercy in action - calling back his wayward children, loving them, forgiving them, and demonstrating the kind of compassion that we would find hard in human terms.

It is a wonderful passage of poetry, ranging from a description of God's initial love, his love rejected despite his concern; then God letting Israel see the result of 'leaving home', and finally his intense compassion and forgiveness in restoring his people to their rightful place, both geographically and in his heart.

Change in God's world does not always happen quickly, and we have to understand that what may seem ghastly and unfair and inexplicably harsh to us now, may have its dénouement decades or even centuries down the line from our short lives.

Psalm 107 is another story of God saving the nation of Israel from their apostasy in chasing after other, more attractive forms of worship. Four times in the whole psalm does the refrain come that 'He delivered them from their distress,' or similar wording. It is another piece of poetry that describes the way we - as an allegorical 'Israel' - lose our way, we drift off after Fool's Gold, and wander into wastelands. Again and again God brings us back when we call to Him.

But do we call to Him at all these days? Or do we only call when we are already falling halfway down the cliff and scrabbling to grab at a branch to save us?

Are we only 'Crisis Christians' who only come to prayer or the church when something has gone horribly wrong in our lives?

You know the sort of person who only rings you up or turns up on your doorstep when they want something - I'm sure you do. Is that also how you treat the God of your understanding?

Do you call on Him as on your bigger brother that you need to sort out the bully down the street? As your brother, he would be only too happy to do that - but he would also be a lot happier if you saw him more often - when you didn't have a crisis on your hands. When was the last time you called him just for a chat - or invited him over for a meal? When was the

last time you sent him a photo of the two of you together - heavens! - was it really that long ago?

Looking at our Colossians passage, we can see Paul getting on his puritan high horse here, and taking all the fun things off the menu; 'sexual immorality, impurity, lust, evil desires and greed,' - and not content with robbing us of our daily amusements, he goes on to take away even more fun things; - 'anger, rage, malice, slander, and filthy language'. I mean, what sort of entertainment are you going to get out of today if you cannot indulge in any of the above?

Change, again, is required; and again of the sort that you probably not only do not want, but also find very difficult - after all, aren't these feelings perfectly natural?

Well, Yes - they are - but so is eating, so is sleeping, so is having a glass of wine or two - but when we indulge in these habits to excess, then they begin to do us harm.

You get fat, your blood pressure goes up, you become diabetic, your liver gets damaged, your arteries harden, your chances of early dementia increase, and so on.

"How on earth" - I hear you scream - "does having a quiet affair that is hurting no-one hurt me?" The answer is because it raises all

your stress hormones, which over time will be associated with all the jolly complications I have listed. If you don't believe me, go and ask any holistic or functional medicine practitioner.

So change is needed, and hanging on to bad things is not good for us.

Our gospel reading from Luke has the rich man hanging on to his money and possessions like my clam with his loose change.

Bob Marley once said that 'some people are so poor that all they have is money.' He is so right.

Sheila and I have never been particularly smart when trying to manage our money, and as we both like to say, 'we aren't, and never will be rich - but we always seem to have enough.'

Neither are we saints when it comes down to being grateful for the sufficiency that we do have - the old green-eyed god of envy sometimes comes to call - but less often as we get older and appreciate what we have more.

I wrote in a Meandering recently that cultivating the 'attitude of gratitude' is a really healthy thing to do, and it releases all sorts of 'feel-good' hormones, rather than the cortisol, adrenaline, and dopamine that get

pumped out to feed our jealousy, greed, anger, rage, and lust.

Recall the bilious-looking man I put up on our picture gallery at the start of the service; I imagine that he died still thinking how he could make even more money. He didn't even get to finish his glass of wine - how sad! And how much poorer could he be?

Recall again the words of the refrain in the song about the Three Wooden Crosses; '...it's not what you take when you leave this world behind you, it's what you leave behind you when you go.'

I tell you guys one thing; when I go, I want to leave behind gifts for all of you - and you can't put any of them into your hands;

I want to leave you love, gratitude, and sense of peace in your hearts that comes from knowing Jesus Christ in every one of your neighbours.

I can live and die with that.