

Reading: Matthew 6:24-34

Money messes with your head. Generosity, the way to break its hold.

A programme we have been enjoying on telly is Nigel Latta's *Mind over Money*. Nigel has done lots of things on TV, some of them better than others. One series seemed to involve him blowing things up - fun for him, but not great TV. But in *Mind over Money* he explores all the ways that money and wealth messes with our heads. Unless we are very, very careful Nigel argues, we end up serving money whereas money is meant to serve us.

There was once a cobbler who was a happy and contented man. People who passed his shop laughed and waved when they saw him singing at the top of his voice while fixing shoes. Many people stopped in his shop just to bask in the warmth of his smile.

One of the people who observed the cobbler was a banker who sang little and smiled less. He seldom slept well. At first he was irritated by the constant good humour of the cobbler, but as the days passed he was attracted to the man. Finally he decided to visit the cobbler and discover his secret of happiness.

After the two men talked for awhile, the banker inquired, "Are you wealthy? Pardon me for asking, but how much money do you make each year?"

"My family is seldom in want," the cobbler answered. "Some days I only fix shoes; no one buys. The shop is closed on holy days, so there is no income at all when we celebrate the witness of a saint. I simply cannot give you an accurate sum."

"How wonderfully simple," the banker said. "I have decided to eliminate your financial problems for the immediate future since you have so openly shared your life story with me. Take this gift of 300 gold coins and use them whenever you have need. "

Overjoyed, the cobbler quickly went home and buried the gold in a corner of his house. The succeeding days brought many changes. He often left the shop to go home when the family was absent, thinking that someone might come when they were gone and steal his wealth. He began to lose sleep at night because he feared that people were plotting to steal the gold. Old friends noticed that he did not sing with the same cheer, and he often seemed suspicious when someone stopped in the shop just to chat.

Finally the cobbler visited the banker with the bag of gold in his hands. "Thank you for your generous gift," he began, "but I cannot really afford to be the owner of these gold coins. Please take your money back so that I may again enjoy music, sleep, and my friends. It seems that when I buried the money, I buried my happiness at the same time."

I buried my happiness. Jesus is very clear in today's Gospel reading. We can serve money or we can serve God. We can't serve both. He goes on to outline all the worries of life, and we can sure lose a lot of sleep over wealth and money.

Every day I meet people who have a dysfunction towards wealth, myself included. You will have met these people too.

There's the "I'm-so-bitter-that-I-haven't-got-more-of-it." person. They look at the very rich, unaware of their own wealth, and have become embittered.

There's the "I-have-pulled-myself-up-by-my-own-boots-straps-and-why-can't-everyone-else." These folk have worked hard and been rewarded and can't see why others can't too.

There's also the spend-it-all-now,-tomorrow-can-look-after-itself people. These folk keep the credit card companies in business. They never seem to have enough and are always asking for more.

Then there's the saving-it-for-a-rainy-day people. They can have huge amounts saved but they are never going to spend it. I can remember one couple that came to me in desperation, "He has 2 million in the bank and won't buy the kids any shoes she said with tears in her eyes." I'll give you his name later David for the restoration appeal.

Deep down when we are honest most of us have a sort of a love-hate relationship with money. It's tricky stuff.

But what to do? How can we break the power of this stuff over our lives?

I want to suggest a way. It's a Jesus way. I apologise it's not very trendy but it is a proven way.

When practiced, this way has the power to break the hold money has on us.

I refer to generosity. I think this is something that the good people of St Peter's know a great deal about. I give thanks every day for the generosity of people here.

Of course the money is important but I think there is a generosity of heart that pervades the life of our church. You only have to look at the garage sale helpers. You would go a long way to find a better bunch of people. I know because I have been a long way.

When we open our hearts and hands to help others, it breaks the grip that greed and smallness of heart can have on our lives. It opens us in the help we give another, in the money we donate or the listening we give or the skills we share, it makes us more open to God.

We give, we share, we reach out, because God first loved and reached out to us. God is a super generous God.

God has already given us more sky than we can see, more seas than we can sail, more sun than we can bear to watch, more stars than we can count, more air than we can breathe, more yield than we can sow, more grace than we can comprehend, more love than we can know.

- *Nick Mountfort*