

A series of sermons based on “Finding Happiness” by Christopher Jamison

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Index

Page 2:	Introduction
Page 4:	1. Anger
Page 7:	2. Sadness
Page 10:	3. Apathy
Page 13:	4. Pride and Vanity
Page 15:	5. Lust, Gluttony, Greed
Page 19:	Summary
Page 22:	Questions – Anger
Page 23:	Questions – Sadness
Page 24:	Questions – Apathy
Page 25:	Questions – Pride and Vanity
Page 26:	Questions – Lust, Gluttony, Greed

Finding Happiness - Introduction

Family Service & Parish Eucharist 6.9.15 delivered by Richard Bubbers

We start today our series on Finding Happiness, and after an introduction on why we are asking this question, I want to look at the subject of anger - an area of our lives which has great power to affect our happiness – whether we are on the giving or receiving end. I trust you have a copy of the flyer with the pew leaflet, which lays out when we will be looking at the different subject areas.

All the speakers in this series will be drawing on material contained in Christopher Jamison's book, "Finding Happiness". Christopher Jamison was the abbot of Worth Abbey, a Benedictine monastery in Sussex, and featured in the television series "The Monastery, and "The Big Silence." If anyone would like to read the relevant chapters of the book, the paperback can be quite easily obtained on Amazon (for about £7), but I just want to say that it isn't necessary to read the book, if you want to benefit from this series.

By way of introduction I want to give you a quote (from a Christian writer, Clifford Longley) which some of you may have heard before, but it sets well the context for asking the question, how, can we find, happiness: *"having constructed a society of unprecedented sophistication, convenience and prosperity, nobody can remember what it was supposed to be for. Just enjoying it does not seem to be enough. Indeed enjoying it as an end in itself quickly turns to ashes in the mouth. Not only is it boringly bland. It is even more boringly purposeless. There is more to human life than comfort, entertainment and the avoidance of suffering."*

The question is, is it possible to find true happiness in the society in which we live today? A few days ago I was visiting someone who said to me very poignantly but very clearly, *'I pass the time each day, but it's no life'* – she was expressing to me her profound feeling that she had not found happiness in her life.

I wonder what we mean by "happiness", "being happy." Our word "happy" comes from an old English word – hap - meaning luck; we still find it in words like perhaps, hapless and haphazard. Originally, happiness was inextricably linked to luck – you were entirely dependent for your happiness upon what happened to you: in pagan times people would try to keep the gods' favour through ritual and sacrifice in the hope that they would get more fertile crops and more wealth etc. But, like other Greek thinkers, the early Christians asked whether how you choose to live your life, could be a way, to finding happiness - so that you did not just have to leave it to chance, and simply see what would happen to you in your life, for your happiness.

In 313 something happened which caused a huge change in the Christian church. The Emperor Constantine, having become Christian, ended official persecution of the Christian church in the Roman Empire, and by 380 AD Christianity was the official religion of the Roman Empire. The Church in Western Europe became less of a persecuted minority and more of an institution with could influence society. As this happened, some Christians were concerned that they would lose their spiritual awareness/their spiritual cutting edge through the church becoming the "imperial" faith, so some of them went out into the desert in the Middle East, either individually or more often together in monasteries, and became known as the desert fathers and mothers.

The desert fathers and mothers were really concerned to have an inner, spiritual life which was alive and growing. And we know a lot about them from a man called John Cassian. In around 360 AD he became a monk in his 20s and went to live in several monasteries in the Middle East and he

systematically wrote down the teachings of the desert fathers and mothers. There were three particular questions, which they were very interested in:

1. how can I have purpose in my life
2. how can I know meaning in my life and
3. how can I find happiness or contentment in my life

They lived in a time where there was much uncertainty and violence. We live in a time where there is also much uncertainty and not a little violence – and also so much busyness. We can sometimes feel overwhelmed by the pace of life, and feel we can do nothing but just rush along with everything else without ever stopping to reflect on what we are doing and why. [Stop the world I want to get off] This is why, therefore, there are things which we can learn today, from the early desert fathers and mothers. There is wisdom which they discerned from their living out of the gospel, which can inform and benefit our lives today.

They saw finding happiness as being about – not dependency on our outward circumstances – but about how we may build up and strengthen our inner, spiritual life. We can spend a lot of time and effort and thought and anxiety, working on the external parts of our lives, but how much time and effort do we give to our inner life. It is our inner life which really affects how we are, what we say, and what we do.

The desert fathers and mothers came to notice that there were certain thoughts which unsettled them and tried to persuade them to give up their inner, spiritual journey. These negative thoughts are present in all of us, and most people half recognise them but avoid really facing them, being fearful of what it might mean to face up to them. The real difference is between those who notice that these thoughts need to be wrestled with, and those who do not.

The desert fathers and mothers noticed that these thoughts came in a pattern that was common to all of them - they were 8 in number:

1. 3 thoughts about the heart and mind – anger, sadness and apathy [spiritual carelessness]
2. 2 thoughts about the soul – vanity and pride
3. 3 thoughts about the body – gluttony, lust and greed.

These are the eight thoughts which we will be looking at during this series, and they provide the framework for our search for happiness.

Just as a comment, they are thoughts which are commonly known as the seven deadly sins - one of them, apathy, got dropped by one of the Popes in the Middle Ages as he thought that it was not such a problem, but many people, including myself – and perhaps you too – think we need to include apathy again, today – and so we have, in this series.

We are now going to look at anger.

Finding Happiness 1. Anger

Family Service & Parish Eucharist 6.9.15 delivered by Richard Bubbers

Being triggered

Whatever may be going on in our outward circumstances, Christopher Jamison makes the point that it helps to remember, that we can do have choices in our inner life. In other words, we may not be able to control what is happening around us, but, if we can make a choice (however hard that may feel), we can have some control over our response. We do not simply have to react to the situation as though we cannot help ourselves - and in some way just allow ourselves to be victims of whatever comes across our path.

But what if it really doesn't feel like you have a choice, when you're actually in the situation – when it is actually happening? One of the problems is that it all happens so quickly—when it comes to anger, the angry horse can have already bolted, before you even have time to think about it.

It may help us on this, if I can mention something about the part of our brain called the *amygdala*. This is the oldest part of our brain and it is always looking out for threats and can sense if there is something present, which was there in a previously dangerous situation. This is what triggers our fight or flight response. Now this, as a survival technique which human beings developed, was of course very useful - especially when human beings lived in a more primitive society, when, for example, they could at any time be at risk of attack from wild animals. But it is not always best suited to what we need, and how we live our lives, today. If we have experienced a traumatic situation in the past, the amygdala, which is so efficient, can mistake a situation as another trauma, when in fact there is no real danger.

To give you an example, I know a man who was on his own at home in the kitchen when he had a telephone call to give him the appalling news that his business premises were on fire - in fact, his whole business was destroyed and he lost his livelihood. For a long while after this very real trauma had happened, if the phone went in the kitchen when he was on his own, he had a strong panic attack over answering the telephone. The amygdala immediately remembered the circumstances as being like the situation when he had the traumatic phone call with the news of the loss of his business. And I understand that the amygdala was so efficient that, if the smell of food was in the house as well, his feelings were all the worse, since at the time of the original call, he was cooking a meal in the kitchen. The problem is that the amygdala kicks in so quickly – in such a fraction of a second (30 milliseconds) – there is no time for the rational, logical part of our brain to kick in - that takes not 30 but 500 milliseconds. The amygdala bypasses the thinking brain, as it is about survival.

To take the same example, it all happens so quickly, that the man who lost his business, has no time to think it through – he has had no time to think rationally, that this is not necessarily as dangerous a call as previously: logically, it is highly unlikely to be a repeat of the same or similar situation. Immediately reacting, or responding with more awareness?

It is good to begin to notice when our body is being triggered in this way. The traumatic experience may actually have been life-threatening, or it may have been something which we really felt was extremely unfair or unjust, and which made us feel really helpless. It does not matter necessarily whether we can remember the original trigger - research tells us now that we do not have a narrative memory (we cannot reliably remember a clear sequence of events) until the age of nine. But, because of the amygdala, our body certainly remembers it. So we need to learn to notice when our body is remembering and reacting in this way, so that we can then make the opportunity to engage our

rational thinking – and effectively have a discussion with ourselves about what is really happening, and whether there is a real threat, and how it is appropriate for us to respond.

Look to see – and notice – if your body is showing any particular signs. Are your shoulders more hunched over, for example? Does your chest feel tighter? Has your breathing altered? The more you try to notice and think, before simply reacting, the more this becomes a habit, which helps our sense of well-being. It can be really helpful to get into the habit of trying to increase the space between the stimulus (the event causing us to be angry) and our reaction, so that we can become aware and bring online our thinking function, before we just respond in anger.

It can be really important if, somehow, we can buy time for ourselves – in that moment between what makes us angry (the stimulus), and our response. And there is nothing wrong in saying that I need to think about this, or can we talk about this later. Even if you have expressed some uncontrolled anger, consider going back at a later time to say you have thought about the situation - and you have perhaps reconsidered what you said.

This allows us to have the opportunity to begin to take responsibility for our reaction. This is put forward as a way of seeing if we can get a handle on how we can do something about the anger we show at times in our lives, particularly at times of stress. Otherwise, it seems to me, we run the risk of just being victims of whatever happens to us outside of ourselves, and whatever may trigger us and cause us to vent our anger. The anger then deprives us of the opportunity to know, happiness.

Anger or rage?

It needs to be said that not all anger is bad. There have been times in my life when I have experienced anger as a real energy to change things which needed changing. Indeed there is the famous passage in the Gospels when Jesus showed righteous indignation in clearing out the money changers from the Temple – they were seriously getting in the way of those people who just wanted to come and worship God at the Temple. What I think we are talking about this morning is what might be better called "rage." People today often talk about "road rage" – the uncontrolled venting of anger. And I think the important word here is uncontrolled – when you just let rip, and you have no control over what is happening, and the damage it is doing.

[I think it's worth saying also that there are a range of feelings /responses linked to this sort of anger. It is not just about dramatic, red-hot outbursts. In psychological terms, in a rebellious child - and in an adult - there can be a range of connected emotions - I'll start at the bottom and work upwards: withdrawing, being bored, delaying, moping, being petulant, sulking, throwing tantrums, and outright rebellion. So when we think of anger, we shouldn't just think of 100%, full on outbursts of rage. As Jamison says, simply controlling to some extent how we express our anger, does not necessarily make it go away, and it can still affect us inside. It can really help if we can begin to notice what is going on - to be aware, so that we can then take the opportunity, more to respond more consciously and deliberately.]

Different personalities - There's another aspect which I think it is important to remember. We of course all have different personalities – if you were to go around the people at church and do one of the personality checks, like Myers Briggs, you would find that between us we have very different personalities. In the context of anger, I think an important question to ask is this: are you the sort of person who goes in for the attack (when you're angry), or are you the sort of person who withdraws into themselves (when you feel under attack and are angry)? Neither response is necessarily good for you. Particularly for those who withdraw into themselves, the energy is turned in on themselves and has to be held inside: as well as causing physical effects, it can if pushed far enough lead to depression or anxiety disorders. And for those who go on the attack, such irrational rage can stress their bodies and also of course affect how they see the world, other people and themselves.

These two responses can be described as aggressive or submissive. But what if we seek to be neither aggressive, nor submissive, but assertive. If we are assertive, we are still able to assert ourselves on the external situation, but without the same damaging consequences inside, to ourselves – and quite possibly others. But again to be assertive like this, we need to develop the habit of noticing what is going on in our bodies [our body memories from previous traumatic or difficult situations], and get our thinking function engaged, so that we do not just react, but have the opportunity to respond with greater awareness.

Conclusion

Time has now run out on us, but I do hope that this series of talks will make you curious, and will possibly be a catalyst for opening up new possibilities, in your own life, and Christian journey. Also, I just wanted to say that it's possible that something may have been said this morning which has puzzled you, or troubled you – or even made you angry. If that's so, please feel free to have a word with me about it, if that would be helpful.

Finding Happiness 2. Sadness

Family Service & Parish Eucharist 13.9.15 delivered by Sue Phillips

Psalm 88:1-9

Last week Richard looked at Anger, today I'm going to look at what monastic teaching has to teach us about sadness.

Sadness: there's a theme! Just think for a minute what that word means to you, and how you'd apply it to yourself. What makes you sad? Do you find that your sadness arises from your relationship with other people or does it arise from your own inner struggles? What are the things that sap your energy and take away your joy?

The Christian monastic tradition integrates the inner journey with the teachings of Christ. Abbot Christopher draws on the idea of purity of heart, something which he says is a hard won quality that focuses on the way we think. As Paul says in Philippians: the way to (inner) Peace is to focus one's thinking on *'Whatever is true, whatever is noble whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable – if anything is excellent or praiseworthy- think about such things. Phil 4:8*

In what ways could a discipline of thought help overcome sadness and rebalance us into a state of happiness? Can we really use our minds to control our feelings?

Hang on: there's sadness, and there's sadness, what kind of sadness are we talking about? We really need a definition, so let's look at the abbot's definition:

Sadness, he says, 'is the interior experience of darkness'. p160. It's a real experience, it's dark and it sits within!

The Psalms are wonderful in the way the authors use poetry to express their feelings, negative and positive. In Psalm 88 we've just read the cry of someone so overwhelmed with sadness that he can't sleep, he's utterly exhausted and he's without hope. He blames God for his feelings, he blames God for messing up his relationships. It's God's fault that his friends can't cope with him, and his complaint is that darkness is his closest companion. That word 'darkness' is repeated over and over.

Abbot Christopher distinguishes 5 different kinds of sadness - low mood caused by temporary chemical imbalance; deep and persistent depression; sadness caused by grief and loss; sadness arising from a sense of life's unfairness, sadness at our own or other's faults. We have he says a responsibility to identify and address the different causes.

1. The cause of low mood can be physical. Factors such as chemical imbalance or fatigue. Re-balancing takes place when the physical need is addressed with sleep, exercise, fresh air. It's important that we develop self-knowledge and come to recognise the sadness that arises from fatigue because we can then take the correct action to rebalance ourselves, and not turn what feels like a drama into a crisis
2. Clinical Depression is another kind of sadness that forms a significant part of some people's lives. Winston Churchill called it his black dog. Whether we view it as a physical or psychological condition, it is a complex form of sadness, and says the abbot, not the type of sadness that can be addressed by spiritual discipline alone. For this kind of sadness we the first step is to get professional help, before embarking on the inner journey. Usually that would be a combination of Anti-depressants and counselling.

3. At the bottom of much sadness is the experience of loss. Many of our losses threaten our sense of identity and expose where we find our security. Loss of a job or a significant relationship can hit at the core of who we are. Loss of a loved one can hit us particularly hard. I'm so glad that Jesus recognised this in the Sermon on the Mount when he said 'Blessed are those who mourn for they shall be comforted'. Actually that's a particularly hard thing to see as a positive. Dealing as we do with people who have recently lost loved ones, in Forget me Not group we see many for whom their bereavement is a truly devastating experience. Coming to terms with this kind of loss is a long term project. It has to start with accepting that life will not be the same again, that a new journey has begun in which that loss is a permanent feature. And the invitation by Jesus into a closer relationship with him is hugely significant. We may each at any time lose those things that bring us security and give life meaning: What then? 'My souls finds rest in God alone, my salvation comes from him' Psalm 62: 1. Says the psalmist. God alone, God alone, is immoveable
4. But what about low mood that deepens and deepens as, like the writer of Psalm 88, we ruminate on the unfairness of life? Life isn't fair. When we look around we can see that this is obvious, yet we still hold irrational beliefs the fairness of life. Certainly the Christian gospel does not claim that that life is fair, but it does claim that God is just and loving. Some of the things that cause us to feel sadness are in fact very trivial and once we gain perspective the sadness is banished. I vividly remember a lesson that has really stuck with me. It was at a point in my life when I was struggling with a lot of things. We were in France returning to the port after what had been a particularly challenging holiday. I was at the wheel when a car shot across a junction catching my rear wing, propelling us towards a wall and a telegraph pole. I remember struggling to gain control and managing to avoid the wall as I hit the telegraph pole. By the time I got myself and my passengers out of the car the telegraph wires were all over the road and the quiet street was full of people brought out of nearby café by the noise. My French completely deserted me and I just stood there looking at this circle of faces, feeling utter despair; was there anything more that could go wrong in my life? Out of the crowd came a child, no more than five years old. She stepped towards me and said 'Heuresement il n'y a pas de morts' ('fortunately no one's been killed'). I can still remember the immediate effect this child's comment had on me. The trying time I'd been through, the mangled car and consequences for our onward journey all receded, and I was thankful. Thankful to God! It took a split second. Perspective was restored! There was hope for the future! I am still grateful to that child. Sometimes of course it takes a much longer period of reflection, time to 'chill', time to analyse our feelings, before we regain perspective
5. The final area of sadness is to do with sadness at our own faults or those of other people. Sadness at other people's faults is destructive, it's a part of that irrational thinking that life should not be as it is. Instead of stimulating fruit of the Spirit, love, patience, goodness, self-control (Gal 5:22) it fosters impatience with others, and love cannot thrive in an atmosphere of criticism. Peter talks about the devil being like a roaring lion prowling about seeking to devour us. The psalms are full of complaint about the destructive power of others. Psalm 55 describes being criticised by enemies and let down by friends 'Cast your cares on the lord and he will sustain you' 55.22 says the psalmist. Peter says the same 'cast your cares on him because he cares for you' 1Peter 5:7
6. But Sadness caused by becoming aware of our own faults, says the abbot, can be a source of joy. As we see where we have gone wrong we often see the way forward more clearly, the way we can change ourselves, and the way to greater tolerance of others. Of course unless we have a developed understanding of the power of forgiveness we can get trapped in guilt and recognition of our own fault brings heartache rather than joy. This is where the Christian way seriously trumps secular mindfulness. We have a Saviour who came to deal with our sin. Jesus took our sin on himself when he died on the cross, that's the core of the gospel message.

When we share our sadness at our own faults with him He both forgives us our offences and offers us his Holy Spirit to help transform us from within. 1365

Of course that doesn't mean we don't have a responsibility to take action where possible to put right our wrongs against others, but knowing we have God's forgiveness enables us to set out on the journey of repair with a restored sense of self-respect.

So to summarise: the monastic way says getting stuck in sadness is a choice. The way out is to cultivate a discipline of hope. *'Sustaining hope is one of the surest ways of keeping sadness at bay and is an important aspect of both mental and spiritual health' as we look for the resurrection of the dead and the life of the world to come.* 1499/1837

The monastic tradition is one in which the inner life, what goes on in our minds and in our emotions is of great significance. By choosing a monastic life monks and nuns have chosen to limit their freedom. As a result they have a lot to offer us when we shift our focus from doing to being, from finding our identity in what we do, to seeking to make sense of who we are.

Finding Happiness 3. Apathy

Family Service & Parish Eucharist 20.9.15 delivered by Martin Allen

So we have before us today the subject of Apathy. We're in the third of our series of talks about finding happiness based around the book written by Abbot Christopher Jamison. So far we've considered happiness, sadness and today apathy. We've heard a little about how the early Christians thought long hard and reflected and came up with 8 areas of thought which, if you were disciplined in your life and avoided them, could support happiness.

Well it's been a challenge to read about and come up with something to say. In the first talk Richard mentioned that apathy used to be one of the 8 thoughts or deadly sins and was removed from the list because no-one was concerned about. That might seem an almost flippant idea or comment but its true and symptomatic of much of society's views.

Apathy – what is it? Mostly it's defined as a lack of interest emotion or feeling and, when applied to emotions towards God, as being sloth. Sloth is “joylessness when faced with God as our supreme joy.” Sloth robs us of our hunger for God. It is a deadly sin of indifference. There is a further definition in the book of a word new to me “acedia” which is indifference or lack of response to God at a spiritual level. A slothful person sees growing in virtue as too much work, so he simply doesn't try and eventually doesn't really care.

Apathy/ sloth is a cold sin, not a hot one; but that makes it even deadlier... God can more easily cool our wrath than fire our frozenness, though he can do both.” That's one reason why I think it can be ignored... Let's hear the bible passage now as it talks about this.

I struggle with this passage. My 21st century ears and brain read it and think “so what”? Surely it is reasonable to prioritise the time we have and what we do with it? Who of us would not get out of going to a party we know we won't like? Who of us have had family commitments we know we won't enjoy and want to duck out? Surely it's ok in our busy culture and lives to prioritise time – we can't spend hours in worship if the meal needs preparing? Surely we can't spend hours in prayer and contemplation when refugees are drowning? Surely we can't spend money on mission when the roof is leaking? Surely I shouldn't treat a person with self-inflicted liver failure when to do so denies cataract surgery to 50 other people who would be able to see? Surely it's ok to prioritise?

I think that is true and there are clearly some important priorities on how we spend all our time talents money and gifts. But to merely consider those is to miss a very fundamental element of what the passage is about – that God comes first. If we don't put God first then other things take His place. For most of us we try and try hard to do so. Where apathy becomes relevant is in being aware of God's love for us and not responding. Here we are thinking about more than just the apathy in society towards things but especially towards things spiritual and towards God.

In secular terms I think apathy is very rare – there may be people who are apathetic on a subject but it's unlikely to be the bedrock of their existence and often there are other things about which they are not apathetic. In the secular sphere by the time we take out apathy caused by life experiences, depression, personality, substance misuse, the pressures caused by society and lack of opportunities, the fact that a lot of people feel they have a spiritual part to their life if not describing themselves as religious there is probably very little apathy left except in one area - Christian faith and God.

Many people are either unaware of the love of God for them or have had experiences which mean it's not relevant to them and so are apathetic towards God. However it remains true that like it or not, know it or not, God is here wanting to shower His love on his beloved and we need to respond. He sends his one and only Son and expects people to respond and they don't. Apathy, Spiritual apathy – Acedia, is the state of mind that in the face of all that God has done for us in sending his Son to die for us has no reaction no response no gratitude.

"In the book *The Screwtape Letters*, by C. S. Lewis, a devil briefs his demon nephew, Wormwood, in a series of letters on the subtleties and techniques of tempting people. In his writings, the devil says that the objective is not to make people wicked but to make them indifferent. This higher devil cautions Wormwood that he must keep the person comfortable at all costs. If the person being tempted should start thinking about anything of importance, encourage him to think about his luncheon plans and not to worry so much because it could cause indigestion. And then the devil gives this instruction to his nephew: 'I, the devil, will always see to it that there are bad people. Your job, my dear Wormwood, is to provide me with people who do not care.'"

If apathy is alive and present in society and part of the life of faith for a lot of people, what can we do about it? How can we help people to lose apathy and respond? Well some things in diagnosis help:-

1. Checking we know God –is Jesus Lord of our lives? The most famous verse in the bible - John 3:16 *"for God so loved the world that whoever believes in him should not die but have eternal life"*. Can we say that we have claimed that as applying in our life?
2. John (20:31), the purpose of writing the Fourth Gospel is stated as: "so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name". Do we believe?
3. Remember who God is and what he has done –that might be keeping notes, a diary or looking back on older experiences to rekindle faith. Preparing this talk I've gone back to a sermon from 2008 and revisited my understanding of how the love of God links to Christian giving from a sermon series 'First to the Lord' which Sue Dick and Mel Smith gave. Revd Mel Smith, especially for me, explained how God's love for us should motivate us to give. As Johnson Oatman the hymn writer said: *'Count your blessings, name them one by one; count your many blessings, see what God hath done'*
4. Confession – is there something we need to bring to God to receive his forgiveness and confess?
5. Preaching – by which I mean modelling God's love in all the ways that Christians can, and do, with being concerned for the poor and needy we heard about in the passage, by showing a positive lifestyle to the world, by being hopeful. *"We must form welcoming communities in which all outcasts find a home, concrete experiences of communion which attract the disenchanted glance of contemporary humanity with the ardent force of love – "See how they love one another!" (Tertullian, Apology, 39, 7). The beauty of faith must particularly shine in the actions of the sacred Liturgy, above all in the Sunday Eucharist. It is up to us today to render experiences of the Church concretely accessible, to multiply the wells where thirsting men and women are invited to encounter Jesus, to offer oases in the deserts of life. Christian communities and, in them, every disciple of the Lord are responsible for this: an irreplaceable testimony has been entrusted to each one, so that the Gospel can enter the lives of all. This requires of us holiness of life."* Twentieth Congregation held today, Friday, October 26 2012, the Synodal Fathers approved the Message of the Synod of Bishops to the People of God, for the conclusion of the XIII Ordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops.
6. Giving – because of what God has done for us we give, we are the object of his love and as we thaw and respond our hearts are prompted to give

7. Reflection – some of the practices that are mentioned, prayer, reading the bible, worship, self-awareness, making time for God, making careful choices over what we hear and see and think and spend time on are hard work and need practice like riding a bike
8. Being in fellowship with people – I don't know about you but in life I need other Christians round me to remind me of God's love – I lose sight of it in the week all too easily and forget all too easily.
9. Being well taught – making sure that when people are talking about Gods word they know what they are talking about and are trained. *2 Timothy 4:3-4 'For the time is coming when people will not endure sound teaching, but having itching ears they will accumulate for themselves teachers to suit their own passions, and will turn away from listening to the truth and wander off into myths.'*
10. Emptying out and quiet – one of the struggles the abbot has as he talks about happiness and his own journey as a novice monk is what to fill the space with when he stopped and joined the religious order. As he did so God became all the more real to him and there was nothing to block God out. For us times of quiet are important and maybe the scared space service or a taize service can provide that.
11. Maybe just maybe (because I'm not comfortable with the angry judgemental type of God it implies) being aware of how God might react: *Revelation 3:15-16 'I know your works: you are neither cold nor hot. Would that you were either cold or hot! So, because you are lukewarm, and neither hot nor cold, I will spit you out of my mouth'*

So we need not be apathetic towards God, we can recognise it and help people around us to see it and avoid it as well as ourselves. We need to build those experiences of the Church being concretely accessible as bridges and help people recognise the “spiritual” elements to their in order that Jesus can walk across them into their hearts.

Amen

Finding Happiness 4. Pride and Vanity

Family Service & Parish Eucharist 11.10.15 delivered by Sue Phillips

Luke 1: 38, 46-55

Today I'm going to explore the most subtle of all: those that affect the soul: vanity and pride. 231 'Demons of the soul', the most dangerous of the eight thoughts, that's what Abbot Christopher calls vanity and pride. Why? He says it's because of the subtle way that vanity and pride ease their way into our lives. It's hard to spot the difference between a healthy sense of self-respect and the damaging effect of a self-centred life. Let's think first about the words we've just read; Mary's song of joy and praise that we call the Magnificat. '*... from now on all generations shall call me blessed*'

Mary is making a huge claim on celebrity. She's saying 'Look at me!' But if we look closely at the way she is saying it, we see that it is in the context of an awareness of the greatness and mercy of God that she is celebrating his calling on her life. It's as if she's standing back from herself and looking with awe at something that God has done.

Self-respect is an enormously important part of being human. Many of us spend years coming to grips with the wonderful truth that we are each individually unique and in this uniqueness we are precious to our heavenly father, that we are gifted by God in areas unique to ourselves, and that those gifts are good, and to be used with confidence. However Life often sends messages of worthlessness. And a sense of worthlessness makes us vulnerable to exploitation or to the opposite, self-aggrandisement. It is a wonderful thing to be able to look in the mirror and say 'You are a beloved child of God. You are so precious that if you were the only person on earth Jesus would have died for you'.

So why am I banging on about the importance of a strong sense of self-worth when we're supposed to be looking at vanity and pride. I said at the beginning that the spiritual demons are subtle. The abbot defines vanity as self-satisfaction: admiration of one's achievements and skills, one's looks or qualities, where the defining quality is achievement above that of others. Today's cult of celebrity makes vanity appear like a desirable quality, being famous is an end in itself. Contrast this with the thrust of Mary's song which marvels in God's goodness.

This might become clearer if we look at pride, defined by the abbot as self importance. Pride says: 'I am more important than you', or at its worst, 'I am more important than God'. Abbot Christopher identifies two areas of modern life that are symptomatic of this search for self-importance

1. Being busy
2. Keeping friends

Back in 2008 those brave people who spent time living in the Monastery were separated from their mobile phones and the trappings of busyness, and they floundered because they did not know how to 'be'. Their busyness had masked their sense of emptiness, without access to their busy lives they felt vulnerable. Modern technology doesn't just massage our sense of self-importance by keeping us busy, for many it can provide access to a set of intense relationships that are always on call at our bidding. Social networking has a massive power to flatter, or to wound.

If we turn now to the teachings of Jesus we can see a contrast between those things that he holds up as a source of blessing, and self-satisfaction or a search for self-importance or superiority would celebrate. In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus says God is especially close (markarios) to the

vulnerable: to those who are poor in spirit, to the meek and to those who mourn. The Beatitudes teach that vulnerability is a gift. In God's upside down Kingdom it is the meek, not the famous, who inherit the earth. It is the poor in spirit not those rich in self-importance who hold the Kingdom of God in their grasp.

And when it comes to being busy, it is those who stand up against injustice who are the ones who are satisfied, those who confront discord and strive to bring harmony who are called the sons of God, and those whose are misunderstood who will be rewarded by God.

So if the work of the spiritual demons of vanity and pride is so subtle, how can we make ourselves aware of their presence in our lives and develop that sense of self awareness that the abbot sees as the first step in overcoming the power of the 8 destructive thoughts? I'd like to share some of my thoughts and ruminations over the past couple of weeks, though in so doing I'm aware that I'm making myself vulnerable, but I'm hoping that I might help you too to flush out the demons. I rather like the way the abbot refers to the 8 thoughts as demons, because it helps us to see them as separate from ourselves and an enemy to our wellbeing. I kind of visualise them like irritating mosquitos buzzing around my life, the moment I think I've splatted them there's another one ready to bite! Here are three questions to help flush them out:

1. When did you last experience a sense of superiority over another person? Now before you deny that you ever do ask yourself the question: Do I ever look at something another person does or has and think I've got one of those, only mine is better/bigger/superior? (I've become super sensitised to these questions as I've prepared for this talk, and I've caught myself out on a number of occasions, some really quite silly. This week I was concluding the sale of my late aunt's property in Devon, clearing out the house on a wet and windy day. I popped out to the shop feeling terribly scruffy and as I walked down the street I spotted a person who looked even more unkempt than myself.. and it made me feel good. At least I didn't look quite as unkempt as her! What a ridiculous thought, but once I'd spotted it I could see how comparing myself favourably to others plays a part in my life. The demon of vanity scored again! How I despised myself!
2. When did you last use your busyness as a statement of self-importance, rather than a reason for not being available for something? I can't come to this or that because I've got more important things to do.
3. When did you last seek out that circle of friends who can be relied upon to make you feel good to avoid having to spend time with someone who can give you nothing in return?
- 4.

My recent visit to Peru brought this one into sharp focus for me. There is no doubt I received more from my visit than ever I could give. You may have heard me say that just the look on the faces of Alejandro and Juan Carlos when they caught sight of me as they processed into the cathedral for their consecration service was enough to compensate me for all the physical discomforts of my expedition. When at the Peace Alejandro flew down from the podium to embrace me I glowed in the sense of self-importance that it gave me. It made me feel so good, so valued, but that's not why I went. My intention had been to bless them. And at that moment I had the choice. The pure heart would say 'praise God that my visit gave them such pleasure', pride would say 'look how much you are valued'. Spiritual pride is at the core of the Fall, let's work with God to expose it in our lives so that we might serve him as he deserves. Then with Mary we can say *'the Mighty One has done great things for me – Holy is his name... he has scattered those who are proud in their inmost thoughts. He has brought down rulers from their thrones but has lifted up the humble'* Luke 1: 49,52 1317

Finding Happiness 5. Lust, Gluttony, Greed

Family Service & Parish Eucharist 18.10.15 delivered by Graham Clark

Once again we are looking today at the theme of “Finding Happiness” from Abbot Christopher Jamison’s book.

Now it’s not my normal style to write out verbatim my thoughts for a reflection such as I am going to share with you, but the transcripts for these talks are being used as the basis for discussion in two house groups so I have to stick to the script! (Incidentally therefore, that means that the transcripts are available to anyone who would like them to reflect on later)

Abbot Jamison comes from a long tradition of monastic thinking which identified eight thoughts which interfered with or disrupted the happiness of his forebears. And I cannot disagree with him when he suggests that the same disruption occurs today. The eight thoughts attack all aspects of our being - anger, apathy and sadness attack our heart and mind, vanity and pride attack our soul, and lust, gluttony and greed affect our body.

I’m not sure why, when we were discussing this sermon series, Richard suggested that I cover lust gluttony and greed, but I’ve been practicing hard all week to make sure I know what I am talking about!

So, what are we talking about here? Well, if we look at the dictionary we find overlapping definitions, which we can distil into “having an unhealthy desire for...” for sex, for food, for things. Wanting more of something than is good for us. The early monastic fathers and mothers, often in desert environments, found that they could be plagued with thoughts of lust, gluttony and greed. Perhaps fuelled by their lack of companionship of the opposite sex, their meagre rations and even more meagre possessions.

And do you think these things died out with the desert monasteries? NO, quite the contrary. These three thoughts, desires, emotions, call them what you will, could be seen as the founding principles of modern society.

The sexual revolution of the 1960’s with its readily available contraception and “free love” turned what was intended for cementing a loving relationship and for procreation into a casual recreational activity, or an exploitative money making venture for sexual entrepreneurs. It’s everywhere and as the advertising men say “sex sells”

The whole of so called “developed” western society is predicated on the desire for more and more things. “Keeping up with the Joneses”. We don’t need a wagon to transport the kids, we need a limousine with seats like our sitting room that does 120 miles an hour. We don’t need a phone to talk to someone, we need the latest smart phone on which we can be available to work 24/7, or to play games (or watch pornography). We no longer need a couple of pairs of trousers and shirts, we have to have an outfit for each occasion with matching shoes and ties. And I won’t even mention the ladies’ wardrobes!!!

As for food – we no longer need three square meals a day, (and it’s questionable whether that was ever necessary) we have “fast food” at every turn. Chocolates, sweets, crisps to snack on all day. Coffee on the go, constantly eating and drinking. Britain is fast catching up America in the proportion of people, children as well as adults, who are clinically obese. Government figures published this May say 6/10 adults and, even more frighteningly, 3/10 children are overweight or obese. We are obsessed with

food, whether it be the relatively innocuous TV programmes with food as entertainment (did you watch the 'Bake Off' final?), or the more serious eating disorders like bulimia or anorexia.

Lust gluttony and greed are everywhere around us, so much so that they become invisible. They are part of the fabric of our society, and therefore, by absorption, our lives.

And are we happy? I'm sure I've read some research somewhere (but I couldn't put my finger on it) that, although the standard of living has increased dramatically in the last 50 years, people report being not significantly happier now than they were then.

Sex is not bad, food is not bad, possessions are not bad, but, using our dictionary definition, an unhealthy obsession with these things, which we call lust gluttony and greed, these are the bad thoughts.

So what can we do about it? What is the secret to happiness?

Can I go back a stage – I'm not sure whether in this series we have yet tried to define "happiness". What is happiness? Let's try some quotes from famous thinkers

Mahatma Ghandi said *"Happiness is when what you think, what you say, and what you do are in harmony."*

"It isn't what you have or who you are or where you are or what you are doing that makes you happy or unhappy. It is what you think about it." was the thought of Dale Carnegie who wrote "How to Win Friends and Influence People"

The Canadian novelist WP Kinsella made a contrast when he said *"Success is getting what you want, happiness is wanting what you get"*

And this search has been around for ever. The great Greek philosopher Epictetus (who lived around 100AD) said *"Wealth consists not in having great possessions, but in having few wants."*

And the one I like the best *"Happy girls are the prettiest"* was said by Audrey Hepburn

Perhaps the distillation of all these is contentment, being satisfied with what you have. I remember having a conversation some years ago with a chap I was working with. He wasn't a Christian but was what you would probably call a "seeker". He was actively looking at various religions and philosophies in an attempt to make sense of the world. It was a wide ranging conversation but the thing he said which sticks in my mind was *"what I envy about you Christians is your contentment"*. Contentment, not happiness.

Let's look at what the Bible says about all this. There are plenty of examples we can use to illustrate the situation, so let's just pick a few.

In the first chapter of Ecclesiastes the writer, who is variously called "The Gatherer" (meaning gatherer of wisdom) "The Teacher" or "The Preacher" describes how he has tried work, studying to gain knowledge; he's tried pleasures, wine, laughter, prestigious projects, gardening, wealth, sex – *"I denied myself nothing my heart desired"*, and to what end - *"Meaningless everything's meaningless"* he says.

In Numbers chapter 11 we have the example of the Israelites in the wilderness who were hungry and bored with the manna they were eating. So Moses asked God and He sent them quails as a change of diet. So far, so good. But God, being God, was generous. There were so many quails that each Israelite was able to gather up extra, 10 homers worth each. That doesn't sound out of order until you realise that a "homer" was a big unit of measure, about 75 gallons. That's 2 x 300 gallon oil drums full, each!! No wonder they made themselves sick by being greedy and gluttonous.

Then we had the story on Harvest Sunday of the rich farmer who grew so much corn that he said he would build bigger barns to store "my" grain – as Richard said then, it was all about "me", MY grain, MY barns, MY life. He was greedy. In a modern perspective we need to remember that,

- if you have food in your fridge, clothes on your back, a roof over your head and a place to sleep (and that's all of us) you are richer than 75% of the world
- If you have any money in the bank, or your wallet, and some spare change in your pocket (and that's all of us) you are among the top 8% of the worlds' wealthy.

The most obvious illustration of lust was the story of David and Bathsheba. David the king looks out of his window one day and sees Bathsheba bathing. He falls in lust with her and has to have her. But there's a problem, she's married. So because he's the king and he can, he arranges for her husband, who's a general in his army, to be sent to the thick of the fighting where David knows he'll get killed. Problem solved! He can have her. What started as lust ended up as murder.

Let's go back to our definition of lust gluttony and greed – '*an unhealthy desire for....* and look at another dictionary definition, or rather a thesaurus list of synonyms

- to desire strongly
- crave
- envy
- lust after
- want
- aspire to
- hanker for
- have eye on
- have the hots for
- yearn for

And what is this word – "covet", where do we find this word? Exodus 20 .17 '*You shall not covet your neighbour's house. You shall not covet your neighbour's wife, or his male or female servant, his ox or donkey, or anything that belongs to your neighbour.*'

The three bad thoughts we are looking at today, and all of our modern society, are based on breaking the tenth commandment! Our happiness, or lack of it, is based on how we react to that tenth commandment.

So, I ask again, what can we do about this? How do we find happiness?

Abbot Jamison's answer from the monastic tradition is self-discipline, trying to banish the thoughts which disturb happiness, or at least to share your problem thoughts with someone else (is this perhaps the origin of the confessional?) To be content with what you have, to eat the food put in front of you, when it's put there at set times, to be faithful to your sexual decisions (which he calls chastity as

compared to but different from celibacy). Another suggestion he makes which seems to make sense to me is, when a disturbing thought pops into your head (and we all know that they will!) to then take time, (and it need only be a few seconds), to acknowledge the thought, and actively decide what to do about it. Just a simple example, a thought pops into my head - "I fancy a packet of crisps". Ok, pause. "Am I hungry, when did I last eat, when is my next meal, do I need to eat more fat and starch? Or am I just bored? No, put away the thought and get on with my work".

That sort of thing can work on an immediate scale, but I think it goes further than that. You have to develop a personal understanding of the situation and positively manage it. You can't just banish thoughts, you have to fill the space with something else. Nature abhors a vacuum, so it is with the mind. You have to think about something.

In Philippians 4 v 8 Paul exhorts the readers of his letter - *'Finally, brothers and sisters, whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable—if anything is excellent or praiseworthy—think about such things.'*

In Matthew 22.37 Jesus sums up all of God's commandments into two, the first of which is "Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind." I contend that, if you do that, "all your heart", "all your soul", "all your mind", there's no room left for the bad thoughts.

The secret of happiness is to love the Lord with all your heart, mind and strength and to think on these things.

As with many things in this life and many things in the Christian life, the answer is really simple and can be put into a few words. What is far more difficult is to put it all into practice. So now all I need to do to be happy is to find a way to live according to these priorities!

Love the Lord with all my heart, mind and strength and to think on whatever is true, noble, right, pure, and so on

Finding Happiness 6. Summary

Family Service & Parish Eucharist 25.10.15 delivered by Richard Bubbers

Matthew 6.25-34, 7.1-11

This morning we are drawing together the theme in the series of talks we have had on Finding Happiness, and how we can take this forward.

As we have drawn on the book by Abbot Christopher Jamison's "Finding Happiness", it has come out very clearly that our sense of happiness /contentment/well-being, can so easily and so profoundly be knocked off course, by the negative thoughts which come into our minds (often called the "deadly sins").

We have looked at the negative thoughts affecting the mind: anger, sadness and apathy; and the negative thoughts affecting the spirit: pride and vanity; and the negative thoughts affecting the body: gluttony, lust and greed. We have seen how seriously such negative thoughts can affect us, because negative thoughts can lead to negative words, and negative words lead to negative actions, and negative actions lead to negative habits, and negative habits lead to negative character. Therefore, how we think fundamentally affects how we live and how we are.

The good news of the Gospel of Jesus Christ tells us, that we need, a new way of thinking. The old way of thinking is not enough, if we want to see transformation in our character and in our lives. The old way of thinking cannot get us to where we want to get, if we want to become the fulfilled people God always intended us to be. St Paul in Romans says that we need to be "*transformed, by the renewing of our minds.*" If we are to be transformed, we need a new way of thinking. And it is this new way of thinking that Jesus is talking about in the Sermon on the Mount – and specifically in our gospel passage this morning.

I want to pick out three things which Jesus says to us in our passage this morning

1. do not be anxious
2. do not judge, and
3. seek and you will find.

1. **Do not be anxious** - Have you ever thought about how thoughts just pop into your mind – quite randomly it seems? The left brain is the analytical part of our mind. It is indeed very useful for dealing with getting through the day, and dealing with the many things we have to do. The problem is that it is not best suited for dealing with the really big things of life – suffering, love, mystery, God. It is not good at dealing with paradox – those unresolved contradictions, which are an inevitable part of human life, not least in our personal relationships. If the left brain is the only tool in our toolbox for dealing with the whole of life, as we grow older, we will find it increasingly difficult to live with those unresolved contradictions / that suffering/those big things in life which we cannot control, which are a common part of human life and experience.

So what are we to do about this? In verse 34 of our passage, Jesus says this: "*therefore do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own.*"

This is a call to be present in the moment. There is a long Christian tradition of learning to be in the present moment. In the course of this series, we have heard many references to the early desert mothers and fathers: their wisdom was that we need to learn to live in the present moment, if we are to engage with, and move beyond, the negative thoughts which can take away our happiness and

contentment. If we do not learn to be present in the present moment, we can spend our time and energy, regretting the past, and being anxious about the future.

It's a strange thing, but our left brain, the logical/analytical part of our brain, does not like being in the present. It is as if the present is not exciting enough to occupy it and hold its attention. The present is actually all that we have, but our analytical brain does not find it enough – it finds it far more comfortable, far easier to stay in itself and endlessly go over the past, or plan for the future, with varying degrees of anxiety. The truth is – and this is what Jesus is getting at here – is that, if we can be in the present, and actually experience where we are, we will not be stuck in our heads but will have a far more fulfilling and whole experience of our lives. We are more than the sum of our thoughts; and if we are not limited to such thoughts, we open up new possibilities for change and transformation. We can actually find ourselves being more grateful for what we have, and less anxious about the future. Practising being present in the moment, can be of great importance, if we do not want to live lives, beset by, and even controlled by, anxiety.

2. Do not judge

In 7.1 Jesus says *"do not judge or you too will be judged. For in the same way as you judge others, you will be judged, and with the measure you use, it will be measured to you."* The message is: do, not, judge. But why is this so important, somebody might say?

In Jesus' earthly ministry, the thing that he found most difficult, was the judgemental attitude of the religious leaders of his day. They were critical of others who they regarded as sinners – and they regarded themselves to be superior to such people. By contrast, Jesus was inclusive - he spent time with, and was concerned for the marginalised and those on the edge of society. Indeed, the Pharisees openly criticised him for spending time with "tax collectors and sinners."

It appears to be part of our human condition that we naturally fall into "either/or" thinking. It comes easily to us to divide people into different groups – us and them. And of course the group we are in, is superior to the other group. As we know, history is riddled with horrendous examples of how such "either/or" thinking, has resulted in persecution, and even genocide. Ultimately, such thinking takes human beings, to a very dark place. And, of course, it is still prevalent today – we only have to look at the news to see examples of this way of thinking, and its consequences. It is a favourite tool of politicians, because it works. It is sad but true, that the human ego gets a real buzz from feeling superior. Only God is the perfect judge: only he knows all the many circumstances of a situation, and we have to trust him, and leave any judging to him.

In the light of the example of Jesus, we see that God wants us to have "both /and" thinking, instead of "either /or" thinking. As we come to the present moment, God wants us to come to it with an open "yes", before we may consider saying "no". If we just come to it with a judgemental attitude of "no" from the start, we do not allow ourselves to see the reality of the moment for what it is, and we then don't have the opportunity to respond to it with discernment and wisdom – we rather just quickly react to it, out of habit or prejudice. If we are judgemental, we seriously limit the possibility of change and transformation. Especially as we grow older, we may well develop some very good filters, and only decide to let in what we already know and what we already like. If we have the habit of judging – and it is very easy to get good at it – we can really limit the transformation God wants to see in our lives, and get in the way of our becoming the people God has always intended us to be. God wants us to make the profound shift from "either /or" thinking to "both/and" thinking: he knows the transformation which is possible through this "renewing of our minds."

3. Seek and you will find In 6.33, Jesus says: *"but seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well."* In verse 7.7, he says: *"ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you."* And if this open approach to life, causes anxiety to his listeners, Jesus adds for good measure in 7.11: *"if you then, though you are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give good gifts to those who ask him!"*

If you are now asking how you are to seek and find, let us look at Jesus' words in John 12.24: *"I tell you the truth, unless a grain of wheat falls to the ground and dies, it remains only a single seed. But if it dies, it produces many seeds. The man who loves his life will lose it, while the man who hates his life in this world will keep it for eternal life."* There is a small or old self that has to let go, so that the true self can be discovered.

It is this small or old self that has to "die", to use Jesus' wording, in order for us to live/come alive – for us to discover our true selves, and for our lives to grow and for us to realise our full potential. This old self, is what Paul calls "the flesh", and it can also be described as the ego. The ego is committed to mere externals - looking after number one, and promoting its own self-interest, relying on its own resources - what it does, what it has, and what others think of it. It has no inner substance of itself, and what it hates more than anything else in the world is to change – even when the present situation is really not working.

The old self/the ego finds it difficult to be in the present moment: as we have seen, it prefers to be going over the past or planning for the future, with varying degrees of anxiety. So as Christians, we need to develop habits to help us calm ourselves, and be present in the moment. There are practices which can help us to still our minds, and to help with deal with those negative, repetitive and often useless thoughts, which can so easily distract us. We need to develop the ability to bring our attention back to where we want it to be, and not just to be distracted and even controlled by whatever thoughts happen to pop into our mind. We can then be in a place where we are not subject to our habitual thought patterns, however anxious or negative, where we can be still and we are more able to hear what God is wanting to say to us. This can become a place of transformation, which can spill over into our lives in all sorts of ways. Someone has said that such contemplative or mindfulness practices for the mind, are like jogging is for the body.

As I close, my prayer is that each one of us may come to know more and more, what it is to be in the present, and to be aware of God's loving presence with us, so that we may grow into the fullness of life he has for us, both now and for eternity.

Amen

Questions

Here are some questions which may spark some discussion on the subject touched upon.

Finding Happiness 1. Anger

Questions for discussion:

1. What happens to you physically when you get angry?
2. Does it feel worthwhile to notice what is happening in your body, when you are triggered?
3. How do you feel about increasing the space of time between the external stimulus and your response (ie buying time for yourself) before you respond?
4. For when you are angry, how does it feel about being assertive, as opposed to aggressive or submissive?
5. Do you think you always have a choice in how you respond, when you are angry?
6. Do you feel this may give you something to work on with being angry? If so, what?
7. Is anger just about violent outbursts? What about passive aggressive behaviour? What about "righteous indignation"?

RDB

6.9.15

Finding Happiness 2. Sadness

1. What does it feel like when you get sad? Does what was said in the talk ring true for you?
2. Do you feel the talk may give you something to work on with sadness, or not? If so, what?
3. What do you dread losing most?
4. What absorbs your spare time and your thinking when you have nothing else to think about?
5. If hope is the antidote to sadness, in what do you place your hope? What gets you out of bed in the morning?
6. If you are placing your hope in what is unreliable and subject to change, do your hopes need to change? If so, what clues do you have on how you might change them?
7. How much time and energy do you give to spiritual exercise(s)?
8. Do you have any irrational beliefs? If so, can you name them?
 - 8.1 This is so unfair, as I've done nothing wrong.
 - 8.2 I'm a pretty good person really. I've never really done anything to justify my being treated badly/like this
 - 8.3 life should essentially be fair to me.
9. How would you change some of these irrational beliefs to make them more realistic, and less likely to cause you sadness?

RDB

14.9.15

Finding Happiness 3. Apathy

1. The purpose of looking at the eight negative thoughts ("deadly sins") is to help provide a framework for self-awareness which can lead to happiness. One way of seeing our current situation in Western society is that we have suffered a catastrophic loss of understanding of the need for self-awareness (how my inner life relates to the outer world and those around me) and this has led to widespread apathy. Do you find this a helpful explanation?
2. If it has been part of your experience, how would you describe spiritual apathy?
3. If it is important to nurture our inner life, do you find you are easily distracted? And if so, why – and what sort of things do you use as avoidance mechanisms?
4. If you want to avoid distractions and to be aware, do you think it is important and helpful to try to have your attention in the present moment?
5. Abbot Christopher Jamison offers this antidote to apathy: do not fill up your inner space with everything other than the desire to recognise and overcome the other seven negative thoughts/"deadly sins". Do you think this is a helpful way to deal with apathy?

NB distractions - we need a bit to help us relax/switch off (hobbies eg garden, dog, sport) BUT the problem is when they take over our attention and become addictions. Augustine said 'Our heart are restless until they find their rest in God'. Only God is big enough to receive our full attention and ultimately satisfy us. Addictions/big distractions try to take his place but ultimately cannot succeed.

RDB

14.9.15

Finding Happiness 4. Pride and Vanity

Pride

1. How do you experience pride (1) in yourself and (2) in others?
2. What do you do about pride?
3. Augustine said *'Our heart are restless until they find their rest in God'*. The proposition is that only God is big and worthy enough to receive our full attention/adoration/worship. Therefore, for our wellbeing and ultimate satisfaction, we need to get beyond our own ego, as our ego needs always to justify itself or protect itself or get some advantage for itself. Do you see it like this?
4. What do you think about pride and nationalism? How might this affect your views on immigration?

Vanity

5. What has been your experience of (1) loneliness (2) emptiness?
6. What you think about the idea of two halves of life (1) the container (things that give you identity and security such as relationships, home, job etc) (2) what you put in the container to give meaning? If we just have the container and no contents, as we grow older we can have a growing sense of emptiness /loneliness – what do you think about this?
7. Do you think loneliness/emptiness opens the door to vanity?
8. What do we do about vanity? In the spectrum from being a doormat to being ever so vain, is it best to seek self-respect in the middle (balancing your own interest with the interests of others)? To achieve this, Abbot Jamison suggest we need magnanimity (bigness /generosity of heart), as vanity always seeks something in return – do you think this makes sense?

RDB 13.10.15

Finding Happiness 5. Gluttony, Lust and Greed

Gluttony

1. What has been the experience of you or friends regarding (1) overeating (2) under eating?
2. Do you think hospitality/eating together is important?
3. The demon (obsession/addiction) of how our bodies look can make the issue of food so complex. Can we make it simpler?
4. Do you think food is like money? – Useful, but you can choose to use it for good or ill. You want to have a good, healthy relationship with it, so that is your servant rather than your master – not to love it too much, nor to dislike it.
5. Food (too much or too little) can be our response to a traumatic situation. Do you think this is true?

Lust

6. What would you say is the goal of sexual relationships? Committed, lifelong relationship?
7. What do you think about sexist attitudes towards women?
8. What would you say if a young person asked you how he/she should choose a marriage partner?
9. Does it matter what we think, if our sexual behaviour is affected by our inner thoughts?

Greed

10. What do you think about the consumer society? Is it a socially acceptable form of greed?
11. What can you do about consumerism?
12. What have you learned about the link between happiness and an inner spiritual life?

RDB 23.10.15

Finding Happiness 6. Summing up

1. Do you agree that, given how our minds work, as human beings we need a new way of thinking in order to find happiness?
2. What new way of thinking does the New Testament offer? Why is it important to learn to be present in the present moment?
3. How can you become less anxious?
4. Why is it important not to judge?
5. What are the benefits of seeking first God's kingdom?
6. How is all this related to dying to ourselves, like a grain of wheat (John 12.24)? Why is our old self/ego so controlling and limiting?
7. What practice can help us to fix our attention on the present moment, and to change the pattern of our negative thinking?

RDB 27.10.15