

The World is Not Enough – Lent for Today

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Matthew 16²¹⁻²⁶ / 1 Corinthians 12¹⁻¹⁰

Lent reminds us that the world is not enough.

James Bond always seems to make fighting the baddies such jolly good fun. To be honest he is a ridiculously unrealistic hero. In this film he comes up against a person, several in fact, whose megalomania drives them to try to takeover the whole world and even this is not enough. Hence the title, 'The World is Not Enough.'

What's enough for you? I bet you've given some thought. Winning Lotto? Would that give you enough? Some research say that around 70% of lottery winners go broke within a few years of winning. In 2002, Jack Whittaker - already a millionaire - won \$315 million in a lottery in West Virginia. Just four years later he claimed to be broke. Whittaker gave away millions of dollars, but people also stole hundreds of thousands of dollars from him and he lost a granddaughter to a drug overdose.

Perhaps money isn't your thing. Perhaps lifestyle is what you're after? A beautiful life? A place in the sun? A room with a view? Of course none of this comes without money – usually and it certainly requires work to keep it in place. And who's to say our lifestyle won't cost others there's? The West at present is

chewing up the world's resources in order to keep its lifestyle at present levels. Is that fair?

Perhaps peace is your Mecca? Just give me a peaceful life – no strife – no conflict – no grizzles – no challenge. I just want no conflict; I want everything to be quiet and still; I want no more problems. I wonder if this is you whether you've ever thought that the problems you don't deal with someone else does. So the problem child we don't deal with becomes a problem adult who does untold damage to those around them. And the problem poverty we turn away from becomes a problem society which has deep wounds causing the members of that society to become hateful and determined and uncaring of anything but satisfying their deep hungers. Or the problem bit of maintenance on the car which you've just can be bothered sorting till it causes a malfunction of the engine in some remote corner of New Zealand, at night! Peace is fine but it always comes at a price.

Fact of the matter is that 'enough' is a real issue in our society today because we are sold the idea that we always need more and if you always need more then you can never have enough! (Actually this is quite a good one – can you see what they're advertising? They're wanting more blood!) When I watch TV today I discover pretty quickly that I need more deodorant more toothpaste, more moss and mould remover and, of course, more Coca cola! In fact I need more of many other things as well

and most of these come, at some point or another, with the suggestion that I need more pretty women. And when I start to ponder these suggestions and really challenge them in my own mind suddenly there's another add telling me I now need more holiday so I can stop thinking about things and just... well just... consume!

The interesting thing is that Jesus found something similar happening amongst the people He was speaking to. They too seemed to need or want more. And the world was in sight here as well because Jesus, wanting to put to bed this idea that 'more was best' said this...

²⁶For what will it profit them if they gain the whole world but forfeit their life? Or what will they give in return for their life?

So why would he make this ridiculous comparison between one's life and the whole world. Would we really give up our lives for the world? In the end this tells us at least two things about human nature. The first is that the temptation of material wealth was as strong then, in Jesus' day, as it is now. Human nature hasn't changed. We are universally tempted if not by wealth as such then by things, by externals, by stuff and the ability to control it.

Secondly it tells us that this temptation is so strong that we might, indeed I believe, will, give our lives away in its pursuit.

We will sacrifice much for the things we want. In other words there is a kind of black humour in these words of Jesus. It's ridiculous to sacrifice one's life in the pursuit of things because the ultimate goal of enjoying those things is lost with the life that one sacrifices. If we're dead, none of it counts! And yet Jesus' words suggest that many are on this path; that perhaps we are all tempted by it and that it takes a really significant change of mind and heart to get off it.

More than this, what is also clear is that the path to true life, the path to a life which is spiritually healthy will always challenge deeply our love for things. Jesus says so clearly **if we want to follow Him** we will have to **give away** the life of chasing after things. As Winston Churchill once said, 'We make a living by what we get but we make a life by what we give!' up and what not to give up because I don't think it's that easy to know.

The wisdom of the Church provides us with at least the beginning of an answer. Giving away things begins with a habit of giving – it begins with us getting used to the feeling of **not having, of not buying, of not eating, of not indulging**. Giving away this life consumed by gaining stuff starts with developing a resilience towards life without those things and so we need to work at such a habit. And this is where the practices of Lent come in.

Traditionally the Church prepared for Easter by entering into a 40 day period of spiritual examination prior to Easter and this

examination included as a central element the practice of **fasting**. Now the fast was often of food of some kind but it doesn't need to be. We might choose to fast from TV or from buying anything apart from groceries and necessities. We might choose to fast from lollies and chocolates, from alcohol, from certain types of reading material or even from certain activities such as watching sport. Let the Spirit lead you. The key is that this should be something which allows us to feel the loss, to feel the emptiness, to feel the grief. As we do this, God will do a work in our Spirits. The emptiness will make room for a new fullness born of the Spirit of God. And this emptiness is so important because for all of us in some form or another, in some place or another, the world is not enough.

There is a deep spiritual principle here concerning our role in the Kingdom of God, something that is very important to grasp and it goes like this. WE are created first and foremost for relationship and relationship always begins with an openness towards the other – an emptiness which is available for the other. A Jewish Rabbi perhaps put it best when he taught that experiences of God can never be planned or achieved. “They are spontaneous moments of grace, almost accidental.” His student asked, “Rabbi, if God-realization is just accidental, why do we work so hard doing all these spiritual practices?” The rabbi replied, “To be as accident-prone as possible.”

In like manner we need to fast to make space for God to fill our spirits and to do this we need to develop a habit of making space – of doing without – of giving up. You see in the end,

despite our cravings, indeed, because of them we must realise that for all of us, **the world is never enough!**