

Sermon Archive 598

Sunday 9 August, 2026

Knox Church, Ōtautahi Christchurch

Reflections: dynamics of love

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In a sermon, as part of his Angelus prayers at the Vatican City in July, Pope Leo said this:

Love is also loss. We find it hard to understand this, especially in a world in which losing seems to be weakness, and which is obsessed with having and possessing. Love, however, bears fruit only in giving itself. When we are willing to lose a little of ourself to make room for the other, to lose a little time to listen to a friend, to lose a little comfort to share in a time of hardship . . .

I have two reflections. The first one is about the culture which is obsessed with having and possessing. The second is about giving, losing, and somehow in that, finding oneself.

But first an Introduction.

An Introduction: Almost mortgage free

On Tuesday, I'm going to see Fiona Huang at the Riccarton branch of the ANZ bank. She's going to receive the money I've been saving over the last twelve months and put it into my mortgage account. I embarked on the savings programme last year when I realised that if I saved carefully, lived a bit more simply than was my custom, then I'd be able to pay off my mortgage when the fixed term expired this month. In the latter stages of my frugality, I had to find \$2,000 for a new set of gas hobs in the kitchen - so I'm not quite in possession of what Fiona needs to cancel the mortgage entirely on Tuesday, but I'm almost there. I should be debt free on the next payday after Tuesday - that is on 20 August.

I've been paying the mortgage since 2008 - when I borrowed \$220K to buy a \$280K house in North East Valley, Dunedin. My lawyer brother, who helped me through the process, talked me through the loan document. He told me that on the back page I'd find a figure that represented the total cost of the loan over twenty years. He advised me not to read that page, because it would make me sick. I accepted his advice, and took on the debt that was normal in those days for those getting on the property ladder.

Each month since then, without fail, I've paid the bill. I've jiggled, re-jiggled, sold the old house and bought the new house. I've made extra payments when I could, and occasionally felt frustrated about my cash flow. I'm currently four months late with my Mole Map check-up, because I can't find the \$350 it requires. But by 20 August, I'll be mortgage free. For me, that means security, having a debt-free asset I can leave to the cats' home. It also means the doubling of disposable income for as long as I continue to work. I suspect I will let out a great, noisy sigh of relief, buy a Mole Map check, get a partial denture for a gap down the back, and a foot massage.

My mother is proud that her favourite but lowest earning child is arriving at a point of financial relief. And quietly, her favourite child also is a wee bit proud. We're proud because we live in a culture where we value financial attainment. We like those who make their own way, who pay the bills, who get ahead as we can. We rise to our responsibilities. We do say prayers for the homeless and bankrupt - but puff out our chests when they are "them" and we are "us". I think that's pretty much how our culture works.

An observer of current events and the characters who form them just now, makes observations about power and money. He notes that Hitler was not a rich person. Nor was Stalin. Nor was Mussolini. Nor was Mau Tse Tung. But today, Trump is rich. Putin is rich. Xi Jinping isn't short of a Yuan or two. Power and money are more hand in hand these days than ever before. And Pope Leo says, in his Angelus sermon, that this is a world obsessed with having and possessing. The conversation is framed around figures who are doing well. They shape our culture - and our thinking about what is worthy. I possess, therefore I am. Jesus has a parable to tell.

The First Lesson: Luke 12:13-21

A First Reflection: A rich fool

Front-footing it onto the stage, as a sort of poster-boy for "having and possessing", comes the rich man whose land is producing abundantly. He has no room to contain the wealth he's creating. One supposes he might have considered giving some of it to Te Whare Roimata, or to Presbyterian Support Upper South Island, or to the Methodist Mission, or Project Esther, whoever it is who does or doesn't operate a night shelter - do we know which cities in our country do and don't have night shelters?

But that is **not** where this mind goes just now. Just now, it forms a plan to pull down the old barns, and to build new ones - to contain (for oneself) the wealth that one does not need. Is that vulgar? Or just the natural, entirely expected outcome for the model within which we work? Predictable, given the thoughts

that set what we accept in our world? ("I will say to my soul, Soul, you have ample goods laid up for many years; relax, eat, drink, be merry.")

Slightly proud of his progress, the minister does his final dash towards a mortgage-free barn. Preparing for the great sigh of financial freedom, though, he finds Jesus finishing his parable by calling the barn-building success story a "fool". He's reminded that life does not consist in the abundance of possessions. "Be rich, instead", says Jesus, "towards God".

Being rich towards God . . . If we managed to rip ourselves away from the big barn culture, we're going to need to think more about "being rich towards God". Maybe it's going to involve uncovering a very basic but strong "divinity in humanity thing" that is a virus to "having and possessing". The dynamics of love.

Music for Reflection

The Second Lesson: John 12: 20-26

A Second Reflection: The dynamics of love

As a non-sequitur within the mathematics of "possessing and having", we find love. Love is a round peg in a square hole. It just doesn't fit. Let's think . . . It makes no sense to hold your love to yourself (to possess it) - love is always about outward direction - about giving itself away. If it's not being given away (sharing itself with the "other"), then it's not really love. The dynamics of love play with the arrogance of the dynamic of possessing.

Jesus uses the image of the seed falling into the ground - being buried. It kind of looks like a death. We, who are about holding onto things, possessing them, see it as a loss, a dearth. But really it's the creating of life. Unless the seed is spent, unless it gives itself away to the earth (sacrifices itself), it remains a tiny little thing. But if it dies, it bears much fruit. Jesus speaks of the little death that serves a greater life. Hold onto the seed, and . . . you have a seed. Bury the seed, and receive life. Those who love their life lose it, and those who don't, keep it for eternity.

It is in the act of relinquishing what we have that we receive. It makes no sense in the economy of having and possessing - but Jesus calls us to discover an economy of the seed being buried -the dynamics of love.

In the spirit of this, the Pope floats a series of scenarios.

Pope Point One. "When we are willing to lose a little of ourself to make room for the other . . ." A colleague of mine, let's call him "Clive", was rushing from pillar to post to do a million parish things before Christmas, and had to squeeze in a communion service at a local retirement village. Arriving at the village in a state

of distraction, frustration, annoyance about having to be there, he set the table. Watching the residents arrive, walking frames, wheelchairs, sticks, crutches and lines of experience of their faces, he realised that this was exactly where he needed to be today. He released his tight grip on his diary, put it onto the wind, the eddies, the breeze of the Spirit. I do not possess my diary, I do not have it - I lose a little of myself to make room for the other.

Pope Point Two. "When we lose a little time to listen to a friend". Hey, my friend. Some of our conversations would be dull to anyone listening in. What did you have for dinner? Was "so and so" grumpy at work today? How's your pot plant growing? These are hardly lofty matters that will shake the world. But they're kind of more important than anything else anyone else could say today - because I love you. Time is worth it, because we're not about possessing. We're about loving. This square peg of love brings a new giving, new listening, new blessing. It's not about possessing.

Pope Point Three. "When we lose a little comfort to share in a time of hardship". Week by week, without making a big noise, or posing by the offering baskets to be noticed by others, Knox people make donations to Te Whare Roimata (did you know that Whare Roimata means "house of tears"?). In the culture of having and possessing, you just don't give things away - because giving things away reduces your capacity to furnish yourself with things you might consider "comforting". The barn-builder says "save that for your mortgage", "keep it for yourself". Yet, there is something at play within the values, and the vulnerabilities to social conscience in this house of Jesus, that causes people to give. We give because we know that out there, there is hardship. And somehow we feel that the seed needs to fall into the ground, if life is going to grow.

-ooOoo-

The dynamics of love, as the seed that Christ has planted in the soil of our thinking, are a challenge to our thinking about having and possessing.

Opening our minds, hearts and hands to relinquish what the world says we need to grasp, we keep a moment of quiet.

The Knox Church website is at: <http://www.knoxchurch.co.nz.html> . Sermons are to be found under News / Sermons.