

Evensong October 2009

In the name

Jack was a big man who always seemed to have a smile on his face. In fact, joy and happiness seemed to bubble in his life. His happiness was so genuine that others discovered that joy and happiness increased in their lives when they were around him.

But, why shouldn't he be happy? He had a good family. He had a lovely wife and two daughters at university. He had a large house and was well set up for life. He was active in his church. He was second in charge of a large company which paid him a six-figure salary. He seemed to have it made.

One day, without warning, he was called into the boss' office and fired. He was devastated. He had invested his life in the company. He had worked his tail off. He had helped the company grow and now, they were letting him go.

Financially, he was fine. But he was devastated that his company would let him go in the prime of life. For weeks he was lost and didn't know what to do.

His self-confidence was replaced with frustration. His friendly attitude changed to one of bitterness. The anger and emptiness he felt even made him consider suicide.

After weeks of feeling helpless and not knowing what to do, Jack began to take an inventory of his life. His wife, who had been his high-school sweetheart, still loved him. His children were in university and their results were excellent. He was still a respected member of the community. His only real problem had been that he had allowed the anger and bitterness and rejection to wage a war within his soul.

Once he stopped dwelling on what was wrong in his life and started looking at what was right, once he understood that his only real problem centered on the way he looked at himself, once he stopped waging war within himself, Jack was wise enough to realize that he was on his way to living an effective life.

Jack's story is not an uncommon one in NZ or around much of the world at present in this time of global economic recession. Many people, including senior management people have been released from their jobs. The problem they face is not one of having to find money to live on, but rather that so much of ourselves is invested in what we do as opposed to who we are, and these can be two very different things.

And what is the secret of effective living? The writer of Proverbs paints a beautiful panoramic view of wisdom as being the secret of effective living. Wisdom is depicted as being the first thing God created and an essential characteristic for every man or woman if they are going to

experience any joy in living. The writer of Proverbs expressed this very clearly when he wrote:

Happy are those who listens to me (wisdom) watching daily at my gates, waiting beside my doors. For those who find me find life and obtains favours from the Lord.(Proverbs 8:34-35)

This tantalizing glimpse at wisdom is clearly portrayed as an appeal for people to discover her secrets. Wisdom offers a high reward to those who follow her way and the reward is not just in money and wealth. The reward of wisdom is the secret of effective living.

Certainly it is good to have enough money on which to live without having to worry too much about it, but as Jack discovered having plenty of money to live on was not in itself a reason for living.

It seems to me that there are three elements important for a happy life.

1. One is being content with what you already have.
2. Health,
3. Love and companionship,

These are the three most essential elements and none of these are necessarily financially based. The love with we share with our family is not bought with money. Likewise the companionship of our friends is not bought with money. Without good health life can be miserable and no amount of money can by itself make you feel well.

As the old song from the 1960 reminds us, The best things in life are free.

Another important aspect of a good life is being able to live with yourself, not just being contented with the world around you, but being able to look inside yourself and like what you see. If our life is full of bitterness, anger, envy, jealousy then we will never be content. For our own sake and for those around us we need to live our life with integrity free from those things which distort our love and our lives.

But there is more to living a happy life. As we are reminded in our scripture readings this evening, a good and right relationship with God is also important.

Through relationship with God we enter into relationship not only with our own creator but the creator of the whole universe and so we are connected with the world around us in a special and intimate way.

Therefore, we are, not aliens living in a hostile world, but rather we are beings created in God's very own image and we belong in God's creation. This is something we should rejoice in and rejoicing is the last element to a truly happy life. As we hear in the scriptures, 'Give thanks to God in all things and never cease in giving God praise'.