

“You can’t take it with you when you go”, because it gets in the way!

I got a call from my neighbours. They are moving house and downsizing. So, they have to move all their stuff into storage before moving it into where they will be next. There is a lag between the two. These two have had full and fascinating lives and they have the kit to go with it.

Now Lucy and I have moved twice across this great country in the last 5 years, and I have to tell you that we have stuff too. We have more stuff than I ever thought. We even “downsized” twice and still we have it. Actually we still have things in boxes in the basement I don’t ever expect to unpack. What are we doing with all this stuff?

You see, every little thing makes us feel better. One item recalls that moment when the kids were small and we needed an extra table and a mat so we bought these....Oh, they are so cute! Another is a book I got when I was at University studying Romans. Here is a cupboard from my grandmother. And the list goes ever on.

My neighbours discussed the fish-tank. Full of pumps and tubes and bits. She said, “It’s a good fish tank.” “Chuck it.” I said. “It was once great but will you ever use it again...really?” They looked at me. “Maybe,” I said, “I spent too long with dying people at the Hospice. You don’t need very much stuff when you are dying. Look at this move as a way to get ready .”

Since arriving in Toronto I have begun to see that I am entering that leg of life which is the long preparation for death. I have entered what Hindu culture calls the fourth chakra of life. This is after being a baby/child, then a young adult finding his/her way, then a builder of a family/business/home and so forth. Then you begin to step back a bit and take a longer view. The first chakras of life are about accumulating the things you need for growing and expanding. The fourth is the beginning of letting go.

Christianity has a challenging re-think on the pattern which is natural to us, the one Hindu teachings observe. Christianity begins with death. What is our symbol? The cross. The place of death. Unless the seed fall to the ground and die it cannot bear fruit. You must be born anew to enter the kingdom of heaven. In baptism we die to our old life and are buried in the deep waters of death so that we can be raised to new life in Christ.

We Christians are the walking dead. We have died to the world and the desires of self-satisfying. We live owning only Christ. This is expressed in its purest form in the vows of those who become monks and nuns, embracing non-possession, no family ties and no ego-driven selfishness (poverty, chastity and obedience) You may notice a severe shortage of monks and nuns in our midst, but that should not distract us from the teachings of our faith that we need to be attentive to these ways in which we should also be trying to live our actual lives, day by day.

I cannot say I am doing terribly well in any of these three departments. I own stuff, I have a family and I have more personal opinions than you can shake a stick at. However....I want to share with you the challenge that today’s Gospel puts to us in this direction.

Jesus’ mother and brothers came asking for him. “Who are my mother and my brothers?” he asked. And looking at those who sat around him, he said, “Here are my mother and my brothers! Whoever does the will of God is my brother and sister and mother.”

What can be a possession more valuable than Mother and family?

Jesus, without a home, an income, a bank account, certainty where the next meal was coming from, parts even with the safety and security of family. He throws himself utterly, 100%, and without a parachute into God's keeping.

The blindness of the scribes to this truth enables them to say, "Oh, he's filled up with evil!" It is unforgivable, not because it makes Jesus angry. It is because they have lost the ability to be aware, even in its blazing clarity, of the presence of the Spirit of Holiness. They cannot even imagine asking for forgiveness, and receive it, because they have lost spiritual sight, hearing, smell, touch and taste. Jesus is living just in the Spirit.

Once, when I was young and idealistic, I prayed that God would let me live in his Spirit without any other visible means of support. I prayed to be dependent like Jesus.

I have experienced short periods of this in my life. It is terrifying (as well as deeply rewarding).

Now, let me tell you how to avoid these moments. **Get stuff around you!**

Get relationships, jobs, belongings, houses and cars, mortgages and loans. Fill your head with knowledge and opinions and prejudices, especially religious ones. Become as independent as possible from needing to rely on others. Get insulated, in other words, from anything that could touch and affect your sacred, tender, innermost self. Make yourself safe and invulnerable. Have lots of certainties.

Or, if you wish to let the Spirit of Holiness dwell in you, start to downsize.

Travel light through this life. Take every opportunity to become poor in spirit and in fact.

Have fewer and fewer opinions about how meetings should work, how children should behave, how the government is wrong, what the church should be doing.....

Instead let your mind be open.

Be less certain that you are right and others are wrong, even if you are sure about it. Give space to other ways to be and to live. Look not at other's faults....

Instead let your heart be open.

Never be afraid to be wrong, to have hurt someone, to have made a mistake. Stop striving to be faultless and perfect....

Allow others to forgive you and to love you.

Empty your cupboards of more than you really need to house. Give away your excess to those who have not enough. Take some of your wealth and give it away until it hurts. Give it away and don't look back.....

Allow yourself to be in need one day, and be blessed by someone helping you.

Sit with strangers at coffee hour. Don't stay huddled in the warmth of those you know well. Don't live your life in a small circle of known, safe people like yourself. Talk to people you don't know at work, on the streets and in shops.

Let Jesus have a chance to sneak up on you and open the windows of your soul.

I don't expect you to walk away, like Francis of Assisi, from your family and your clothing. We are, after all, Anglican! But I encourage you towards a poverty of life, a degree of vulnerability and uncertainty, and a little loneliness which makes room for you to live in the Spirit of Holiness which sustained Jesus.

You cannot take it with you when you go. It will get in your way. So carry less and less of it in life and experience the lightness, the freedom and the life Christ will give you.