

The other week I had one of those moments when your way of thinking is turned on its head I was talking to someone who has one of these fitness checkers you wear around your wrist, it's called a Fitbit. They count the number of steps you take each day, and tell you if you've achieved your target - 10,000 or whatever it is. Has anyone here got one on? If you know anyone who has one then you've probably heard them talk about how many steps they've done.

Well, my friend was very excited about reaching his target number of steps. He works some of the time at Wakefield cathedral, so what he'd started to do was to park the car 20 minutes' walk away from the cathedral and walk in. That way he added another so many thousand steps.

That was quite a revelation to me. For all my life my aim has been to park as close as possible to wherever I'm going - even if it means driving round the block 3 times to find a space. Even if it's in the Coop car park. Parking further away on purpose is highly counter intuitive - but from a fitness point of view it makes sense! No doubt you will all be parking as far away from the church as possible now! Or you could just walk from home...

Sometimes our way of thinking about something gets completely skewed, and we have to reset it. One of the subjects which we often ending up thinking about in a skewed way - along with most of the population - is money. Our first reading is a wonderful rant. This poor

guy is complaining about working so hard only to leave all his money to someone else - 'one who has toiled with wisdom and knowledge and skill must leave all to be enjoyed by another who did not toil for it.' He's really fed up. He obviously hasn't heard of SKIing, as they call it - 'spending the kids inheritance'. I guess they didn't have cruises in his day.

You sense that this person's attitude to money isn't healthy. He puts himself under great strain to earn more, and then feels resentful. I wonder how widespread that feeling is? Money often tends to make us cross - especially when we feel unfairly done by. That was the case with the person who spoke to Jesus in our gospel reading. 'Teacher, tell my brother to divide the family inheritance with me' he says. You can feel his resentment - and just how important this issue has become to him.

But Jesus sees that underneath his comment is an unhealthy attitude to money - that is what is really destroying his life. We may think that the one thing we need to make us happy is more money - we may even start getting more and more money - but in the end, like the farmer who built bigger and bigger barns - just having a lot of money or a lot of stuff or a big house or a big car will never make us happy.

We sometimes wonder why the really wealthy seem so greedy - why the bosses want their big pay rises or their bonuses - but the truth seems to be that wherever you are

on the income scale, you can be trapped by money. If you're rich, you buy a big house, you have a big mortgage, your children go to fee paying schools, you have huge costs to join the local golf club, you need to have holidays, clothes and cars that fit your status - so you have to work harder and harder to keep the money coming in - you're trapped.

Well, we may say, we're not like that! Probably true - but most of us can end up getting trapped by money in one way or another. Are you one of those people who loves picking up special offers when you go shopping? I am. My mum feels guilty if she pays full price for anything.

Who decided that saving money when you go shopping was one of the 10 commandments? Where does it say in the bible 'thou shalt buy the two for one offers and only chooseth goods with red stickers on them'?

Is it partly a hangover from the war years and afterwards when food was scarce and so was money and you had to learn to make do and save where you could? Or is it sometimes - as it is for me - that we would like to buy something indulgent but we think we can only justify buying it if we get it for a low price?

Maybe it's sometimes a regression to our earlier existence as hunter gathers - we go round the Coop hunting for reduced items and we return home victorious with our bounty. We quite enjoy the thrill of the chase. And at least

sticking to the special offers frees us from the modern tyranny of choice.

So it might be pleasurable to always find the cheapest price - but that doesn't make it an 'ought'. Whatever we have been taught by our parents, buying things cheaply is not the first great commandment. In fact our insistence on buying things cheaply can cause some profound problems.

Why is milk so cheap that dairy farmers produce it at a loss? Why did poultry farmers find more and more efficient and cruel ways to bring us low cost chickens and eggs? Why do producers in the developing world get paid a pittance for what they supply? Partly, because of our overriding belief that cheapest is best.

There has been a bit of a backlash against this recently. We have begun to learn that paying more can sometimes be good - paying more for animal welfare, paying more for fair trade, paying more to shop local. Consumers are learning about 'added value' which goes beyond price, and sometimes they are willing to pay.

But it's a struggle. If a cheaper supermarket opens down the road, which doesn't support local communities, we may well run to it and rejoice at the £5 we save in our trolley. For some people, that saving would be really important - they can't afford to make ethical choices. But not for all of us.

Shopping is just one example of the way that money can get us by the throat. There are lots of other examples of the ways we try to save money or to make money which end up with the tail wagging the dog - with us losing precious time chasing a few pounds or becoming more stressed not happier. I'm sure that you can think of your own.

We've just changed some pounds for foreign currency. Not a good time to do that! The time I've wasted checking the exchange rate. And if we miss a good deal, we feel robbed. Or if we lose money some way or other, we feel gutted. It isn't just our time that money steals from us - its our headspace, and our hearts. It's the control over the way we live our lives. Greed eats us up, in small ways and in big, and often we can't see it.

When I came back from my long retreat a couple of years ago, for a time something shifted in my attitude to money. My experience of spending time in a closer relationship with Jesus seemed to have freed me from some of these chains. I started talking about our money in a different way. I started saying, rather naively, 'it's all Jesus money'.

It sounds so simplistic and unworldly. But it really made a difference. If we lost money through some decision, then looking in this new way with God sometimes helped us see that our reasons had been good, or we'd just made a mistake, or anyway, it's not something that God would care about that much. Instead of spending a long time trying to justify a purchase by getting it cheap, I could

sometimes see that it was fine to buy it at full price - if it was Ok to have it, it was Ok to have it. And sometimes I could let go of my need, my desire, to get this thing at all.

If the money we're spending isn't our money - the money we have worked so hard to earn - if in the end it is Jesus' money, how does that change things? Does it free us to make some different choices about how much we work, or about what we spend, or save, or give away?

If we can learn to trust more - to trust that God will help us find the things we really need in our lives - things like wellbeing, and peace, and good relationships, and love - then maybe we don't need to be quite so focussed on money. I found it tremendously freeing to hand back my responsibility for money to God. If it's all Jesus's money, then I am no longer the only one who has to look after it on my own - I can involve God.

So today's readings can be a wake up call, to help us see how our way of thinking about money can get skewed. Maybe today is a good day to ask God to set us free, and to begin to change our attitudes. And maybe what God wants to give us most of all is the gift of a simpler life.

Brother Roger, from Taizé, says this:

Happy those who abandon themselves to you, O God, with a trusting heart. You will hold us in joy, in simplicity, and in mercy.