

How happy do you think you would be if you got what you wanted? I'm not talking about any immediate small scale wants here, such as if you want to scratch inside your ear or want the rector to get a move on and stop droning on. Sorry, no chance there. Perhaps what you really want right now is a cup of lukewarm weak milky tea in which case either you are my mother, and what on earth are you doing here, or you are seriously weird, in which case, welcome home. But briefly diverting they may be, it is not those sort of wants that will keep us company for the next few moments.

Instead, how about the big stuff that people want but only get with either a lot of effort or a lot more luck, if they get them at all? How about being rich? So many of us want to be rich. Would it make us happy if we were? I still haven't had the chance to test the proposition personally that being rich makes you happy, and never will, but I can vouch for the fact that being poor doesn't.

Almost all my relatives are working class northerners, but there is a crooked branch of my family tree that has, undeniably, made it rich. As far as I can tell the monied lot are no happier than the clog clickers: everybody complains at the drop of a hat: they're just unhappy about different things. Such as whether Waitrose will deliver the quails on time. At least I've never had to worry about that.

But it's difficult to be objective about a relative. What about the people who have become really rich overnight, the lottery winners, the Viv Nicholson's of the world. Does an instant win bring instant happiness? There have been enough pools and lotteries now for enough time that there has been proper research in this area, and despite all the clichés we like to tell ourselves about sad rich people, the answer to the question 'does an instant win bring instant happiness?' seems to be, yes it does. Suddenly coming into a lot of money *does* make you happy... ..for a while, until you become used to having a lot more money than you did and then you tend to revert to where you were before. Although we might desperately want to be rich, and it changes many things, once we become acclimatised to the idea, it doesn't make much of a difference to whether we are happy or not.

If not fortune, then, maybe it is fame that is the route to happiness? Certainly many, many people crave celebrity to the extent that they will happily put up with the humiliations of reality TV, Instagram, TikTok and worse to get it. There must, I guess, be a thrill to being recognised, a buzz the first few times someone asks for your autograph, a feeling of great worth when millions of people want to read about your

life or hear what you have to say. But then fame is fickle and before long millions will be lapping up magazines for the malicious delight of seeing photos of you in your bikini showing off your cellulite, love handles and bingo wings, and then chuckling at every sordid detail of your seventh failed marriage. Nobody, surely, wants that. 'The only the thing worse than being talked about' quipped Oscar Wilde 'is not being talked about'. Snappy saying, it cannot possibly be true.

How ever much we may yearn to invite them in, most of will never play host to Mr Rich or Dame Fame. But what about romantic love? From Plato to the Proposal, from Jane Austen to Taylor Swift human culture tells us we want it and experience tells us that many of us get it. Is finding the right significant other the key to 'happy ever after'? Anyone can see that there is an extraordinary intensity to the happiness being in love can bring, and people, as well as being clearly petrified, do tend to look pretty pleased on their wedding day. And often unrecognisable- it's amazing what a professional make-up artist can achieve. Beautiful for their nuptials they may not be looking quite so radiant 3 years later and after 20 years it's quite often the case that the main desire of one is the bingo hall and the other the garden shed. There can be scarcely anyone in church today whose kith or kin has not been touched by the unhappiness of a broken relationship or a divorce. It's not everyone's experience by a long chalk. For many, love doesn't go away, but almost always, it does calm down. And eventually death parts even the most dedicated. It may be better than money and fame but even true love might not be everything we hoped it would be.

So why is it that when we get the the things we want the most, when we get those things that probably 99% of human endeavour is directed toward, why is it that we are still not happy? How is it, that day in day out we can gorge ourselves with goodies, but are never quite full? Why do rich people want to be richer still, why the madness of the seven-year itch? Why is it that some people are never satisfied, and those people are us?

For Christians, one of the most enduring and indeed poetic of explanations for our failure to be satisfied by success was offered way back in the 4th century by the towering intellect of western Christianity Augustine, Bishop of Hippo (and you thought it was just the Bishop of Barking had a comedy see).

In his *Confessions* Augustine famously says:

*You have made us for yourself, O Lord, and our hearts are restless until they rest in you.*

Just because St Augustine said it doesn't mean it's right: he was so desperate to get it right he said some pretty silly things in his time, things that make most theologians wince, like original sin and double predestination. But I doubt there is a better explanation for that nagging feeling that even when we get what we wanted it wasn't quite what we wanted after all.

*You have made us for yourself, O Lord, and our hearts are restless until they rest in you.*

Now just a little clarification and a note of caution here. What Augustine does not mean is 'we will not be happy till we die'. It may seem obvious to you, but how often have Christians found themselves pushing the 'when we all get to heaven' line? This world doesn't matter, it's the next one that really counts? I have a Victorian Revival Hymn book at home and that's pretty much what ever single song says. But we do not have to wait till we die before we see heaven. Our hearts can rest in God now.

There is a rather odd part of the Easter gospels, in the tale of Mary Magdalene meeting the risen Jesus in the garden, where, once she recognises that it's not Monty Don she's talking to, Jesus says to her 'Don't hold on to me'. Odd you might think- I mean what would be more natural than to rush to embrace the person you thought was dead? But Jesus is not worried about getting his garments mucky or being squeamish about appropriate physical contact. He's pointing out that what is important, central, essential to following him is not seeing him with your eyes or touching him with your hands, but *belief*. Very, very few people met Jesus in his thirty-three years of physical reach-out-and-touch ministry on earth: many fewer of those recognised him for what he is. Seeing is not believing; on the contrary, it is faith that allows you to truly see. Whereas very few saw with their eyes and touched with their hands, all can believe, all can meet Jesus by faith. In this way, millions of people have met Jesus; a bare handful of people met him in the flesh; millions of hearts have found their rest.

Faith nevertheless, is not something we arrive at: find Jesus, happy ever after thereafter. Our hearts' rest is a journey, a restless striving; the pillar of cloud by day, fire by night, God's great pilgrim people, on the move. And the first step on the journey is also, in a curious way, sort of the last; though there a million million paces between here and heaven, the kingdom of heaven is already among us; we are journeying to the promised land, but God is already with us; when we have packed our bags and followed the star, our yearning, wandering hearts are already starting to rest in God.

This morning we welcome Sierra and Fiadh into Christ's church by baptism. We have the astonishing privilege of witnessing the beginning of *their* journeys into the Christian faith, the pilgrimage that has its end when their hearts rest in God. For Fiadh and Sierra today marks their first steps on that journey. This is the moment for them when they have been given the treasure map. A cross marks the spot where the riches are buried. We, already journeying on, are here to cheer them on their way, to urge them on to the ultimate prize.

That prize might not be quite what they, you or anyone else were expecting. But meet Jesus in your heart, and your heart has found its rest; meet Jesus and you are 100% guaranteed to have finally got what you really wanted.