

You are 20 minutes into a film at the cinema and you realise you have made a terrible mistake. It's awful, and it's not going to get any better. You've paid £10 for the ticket and made a special journey. There's an hour and a half to go. What do you do? Whether you leave or stay will depend on whether you think your money is worth more than your time. £10 or 90 minutes of misery? In economics it's called an 'opportunity cost', and it's all about giving worth. As a born again Yorkshireman I have to say that it would take a lot to get me out of the cinema. Because I've paid for it, haven't I?

In your head, compile a list of the biggest causes of stress and anxiety. The answers are pretty predictable. Work, family, health, the economy, money. The biggest single stress factor? Money. In a 2013 survey, one in three people said they stressed about money every day. Last year an American survey said seven out of ten people stressed about money at least once a month. Money, of course, has the capability of being used for great good, for pleasure, for growth. And it also has the power to cause great harm, not just actively, but passively - even through the fear of not having enough. It affects emotion, physical health, spirit and soul.

One of the things we do in wedding preparation in our deanery is get couples to talk to each other about where their attitudes to money come from and how family finances

were handled or mishandled as they were growing up. We do so with great care, because even just deciding who sorts out the banking, or whether you can afford to go out for an evening taps into our deepest hopes and fears about security and the future, and our very sense of worth. Money goes way beyond a simple financial transaction. Money is life. It has power. It demands attention.

That's why we are not good at talking about it. We get cross, or fearful, or embarrassed, or officious. Some people talk about it too much, using their wealth to show off and get one up on others. Most people don't want to talk openly about it at all. What I find interesting now is that we are able to banish money completely from view. Many people are cashless. We have a remote and virtual relationship with what we earn and what we spend. It's as if it's so powerful that we need to hide from it.

If you did an analysis of the Gospels, what did Jesus spend most time talking about? You'll know by now what it is. Sixteen out of Jesus's thirty-eight parables were concerned with how to handle money and possessions. In the Gospels, 10 percent of verses (288 in all) deal directly with the subject of money. The Bible overall offers 500 verses on prayer, and just under 500 verses on faith. How many verses about money and possessions? 2,000. More than four times the number of verses about prayer, or faith.

Powerful, frightening, awesome, everywhere, desirable, worth it. Normally, at the Minster, we spend one Sunday a year doing what Barbara Gilman's article in this month's

Magazine called 'Drum-banging about Money' – and she gave it a capital M. I want to apologise. How on earth can we only spend one Sunday a year – two sermons – talking about the single biggest cause of stress in contemporary life, and the single biggest subject Christ Jesus the Lord ever spoke about? Jesus said money was capable of being served, and called it a power. So I'm sorry. Two sermons out of 104. It's a huge oversight. We should look at it far more.

Normally, as Barbara also pointed out, our look at money is tied up to the specific needs of the church. Many charities look to prick people's consciences, pointing out their needs, and working on guilt. People will pay for something they can see, evidently. I've commented on this in the October Magazine, out next week. I, for one, can't stand those 'chuggers' who stand in Toll Gavel, and the charity world has had to face some hard truths about the effect of this on vulnerable people. So this sermon about money, and ones which will happen in October and November too will not be about a leaking roof or a looming crisis.

But they will be about what we value. What we give worth to. And what we want to do as a result with this amazingly powerful entity we deal with every day. 2 Corinthians 8 and 9 are fabulous chapters about money, and we're using them today, on October 18, and in November too. Have a careful read through them. Taking a collection for a church in a famine led Paul to write some of the most elevated and inspiring theology there is. It's full of words like grace, love, ministry, fellowship, joy, generosity. We shouldn't be surprised. If money is the closest thing this life gets to the

power of God, if money is about what we give worth to, then using it as a Christian opens us up to God's greater power. Giving what has value in the cause of loving the one we value most of all unleashes awesome possibilities.

I think that's why Paul is so excited in the beginning of Chapter 8. One church, in Macedonia, has understood it, has got it. They've understood that they have brothers and sisters in trouble, and that the highest value they can give to God is to use what they have to help. But what he's most excited about is that this is not simply doing to others as they hoped others would do to them. It was worship. It was recognising that all they had came from God, and giving their money away was giving to God. "They gave themselves first to the Lord". Their money, their possessions, belonged first to God. And as part of their worship and prayer they chose to give most value to enabling their money to do good for others. What they decided to do with their money was dependent on the worth and value they gave to God.

Let me offer you a measure of love, worth, value? "You know the generous act of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, so that by his poverty you might become rich." 2 Corinthians 8. 9. Now that is an 'opportunity cost'. That is a measure of worth. As we continue to explore money, and indeed as we look at how we use money in this parish in our stewardship programme in October and November, may God assure us that, in Christ, God gives us ultimate worth and value. Always. And for ever. Amen.