

2 Samuel 11. 1-15

Ephesians 3. 14-21

Mark 7. 1-8, 14-15, 21-23

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I explore this because in this list of evil intentions we find something we might classify gambling under; and that's *avarice*. The dictionary describes avarice as: *extreme greed for wealth of material gain*.

So given that we have been fed the narrative *gamble responsibly* the gambling industry wants us to believe that the choice, yes the choice, to gamble is purely an individual one, and that those who get into gambling debt are constitutionally flawed, weak, irresponsible, maybe even with an evil heart. Certainly, in terms of the gamble responsibly narrative, derelict in *their* responsibility to their family, their employer, their bank, whoever.

Tim reminded us that what playing the pokies does, an activity which requires no skill at all, is that the machines are programmed in such a way as to release endorphins in the brain; give us a happy buzz; jingle our worries away, sooth us, at least for a moment.

The constitutional weakness which we have been led to believe is an individual gambling addict's weakness we can also then translate to other addictions – drug use, alcohol addiction, sexual addictions, work addictions, financial obsessiveness around money, both overspending and miserliness, perfectionism and a need to be in control. All these have an addictive compulsion behind them to sooth and settle the inner distress. While we see some of these things as a societal problem and we launch wars against them – bring in the NRA – it is individuals who are impacted, families which are torn apart by consequences of the addictive behaviour. The addict as seen as the weak link; the irresponsible one.

Over the last decades it has become clear through a deepening understanding of psychology and other scientific fields that there is an abiding, underlying element present across all forms of addictions and that is of the presence of shame in the individual story. I don't venture here lightly, because I know addiction is in some of your stories in tragic and painful ways; years ago and still present now.

The thing about shame is it a mantle which individuals are given, too often in childhood, which says to them – sometimes in words – but often in non-verbal, often pre-verbal, and visceral ways that they are unworthy at the very core of their being. Indeed, shame has been so much of our socialisation process as a means to control behaviour. And shame begets shame. As bullies are usually been reared by bullies, if an individual's life is crippled by shame it is likely that shame is part of the family tree. So often the result of some trauma in the past, the impact of which is passed down so often from generation to generation.

To sooth the pain of this trauma people find habits which release endorphins in the brain and take the pain away, albeit momentarily, but we become addicted to the hit, the high. Tim described the effect of an endorphin hit as more powerful than cocaine. Endorphins are natural pain relievers. They are “feel-good” chemicals because they can make you feel better and put you in a positive state of mind. Until they don't make you feel better because everything is falling apart.

We know from learning about psychology and other fields of scientific endeavour all sorts of things about the body and the mind over the last century or so, that these evil intentions of the heart which Mark lists for us, have all sorts of complex causes and interconnections. How we interpret the presence of them in a person's life or circle, has an impact on how we understand and deal with them. If we individualise them and moralise them, then it remains an individual problem. Everything in our hyper-individualised way of understanding ourselves now, causes us to want to interpret addictions in this way; and so abandon our collective responsibility. A collective war on drugs makes a government look like they are doing something about it. But a collective attention to all of the social and cultural and economic forces which are increasing the incidence of depression and domestic violence and financial vulnerability – which leads people to find ways to soothe their distress – that's harder. Because this also challenges our collective, taken-for-granted assumptions about what it means to get ahead, to be successful, to be on the progress treadmill, and our attempts to make it look like everything is just fine.

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You might call the mindlessness – an emptying of the mind - a kind of mystical attention. You might remember the video from Richard Rohr a few weeks ago contrasting moralism with mysticism. We are so enculturated in the church with a moralistic response to our own and others' challenges. Richard suggests that the mystical response allows for the incorporation of all that we have been and are into our sense of self; the light, the dark, the successes, the glorious failures, the trauma, the joy. As God sees us with eyes of love without condition, so we are invited to allow this gaze for ourselves. Love your neighbour as yourself.

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Andrew Boyle

2 Samuel 11. 1-15

Ephesians 3. 14-21

Mark 7. 1-8, 14-15, 21-23

We have just heard from Jesus lips in the gospel of Mark one of those lists and, I don't know about you, but for myself it is one of those lists that provoke in me a sort of tone of moral disgust. There's a sort of sanctimonious inner voice which kicks in when I hear such a list. Paul has a few of them; but here is one in the gospels: fornication, theft, murder, adultery, avarice, wickedness, deceit, licentiousness, envy, slander, pride, folly. How do you hear it? What does it elicit in you? I feel like I throw up a kind of virtual firewall of defence.

It feels like somewhere, some time in my past there was a kind of tub-thumping sermon about these kinds of behaviours. Now, I haven't had time to explore this question, but it does feel to me that this list may have been added by a later hand to the gospel. Scholars are clear that there are two additional endings to Mark's gospel which were not in the original text; added later. This list feels like a later addition too; this kind of detail is not normally the concern of Mark's Jesus. But that's only a hunch at this point.

When I ask the question: *how do you hear*, I'm wondering about what filter do we hear the text through; because whether we are aware of it or not, all that we hear we hear through filters of various kinds. And our filters cause us to say somewhere in our thought processes: oh, this is that kind of story.

Here's an example from the story of David and Bathsheba. In the NRSV translation of the bible this story comes with the heading *David commits adultery with Bathsheba*. Is this all the story is about? I'm not sure. What that heading does is it says that this passage is about sex and betrayal. These heading don't appear in the ancient texts, so always be wary of them. The NIV merely says: *David and Bathsheba*. The New American Standard Bible heads it: *Bathsheba, David's great sin*. The KJV has no heading at all. You see, if there's a heading like *David commits adultery with Bathsheba* – we already have a lens through which we hear the story; and so we hear it in a particular way. The heading could have been *Bathsheba gets her kit off in sight of the palace and seduces the King*. Or *David has Uriah murdered*. Or *the Hittites effect a palace coup through Bathsheba*. Entirely probable. The Hittites were an empire based in what is modern-day Turkey and Bathsheba, the wife of Uriah the Hittite, bore the next king: Solomon. Playing the long game; let's get some influence in the palace. That's certainly part of what's going on.

So, when Jesus says *For, it is from within, from the human heart, that evil intentions come* I find myself hearing the list which follows through a filter which got into my way of viewing the world at some time. Of course words like evil and defile raise a kind of disgust response. I hear an echo of John Calvin:

Calvin writes in his *Institutes of the Christian Religion*:

Original sin, then, may be defined as a hereditary corruption and depravity of our nature, extending to all the parts of the soul, which first makes us obnoxious to the wrath of God, and then produces in us works which in Scripture are termed works of the flesh. ... even infants bringing their condemnation with them from their mother's womb, suffer

not for another's, but for their own defect. For although they have not yet produced the fruits of their own unrighteousness, they have the seed implanted in them. Nay, their whole nature is, as it were, a seed-bed of sin, and therefore cannot but be odious and abominable to God.

So when Jesus says: out of the heart come ... I begin to hear in a particular way. A pointing the finger kind of way. But is this the way Mark meant it to be read? We can't say. But, maybe there are other ways to consider these sayings.

Yesterday, a number of us were at the CCC breakfast and heard the Rev. Tim Costello talk about how gambling has our country in a most appalling strangle hold. He drew the analogy between the way that the gambling lobby has control of the Australian body politic to the way the American Rifle Association has the American body politic in its thrall. He gave a few examples from deep inside Australia's places of political power of how beholden politicians right up to the premiers of states and the PM are rolled by the gambling industry and the commercial media. It was truly frightening.

Tim drew the link between what the gun lobby has done in the USA since the late 30s and what began here in the 1950s. You will know how gun-toting Americans claim the right to bear arms as their constitutional right, expressed in the Second Amendment in 1791. The right to bear arms was a collective right enshrined in the constitution to enable state governments to mobilise militias to defend against a national army that might be at the behest of the British monarch. This right was a collective right. But the NRA in the last decades has transformed this from being a collective right to defend against an external military threat to an individual right to guard against neighbour. From a collective right to bear single-shot muskets to an individual right to bear semi-automatic rifles. The NRA turned the narrative into one about individual freedom. It's not serving them well.

Tim told us that people were sent from the NSW gambling industry to learn how to shift the Australian narrative around poker machines, which were under threat because government could see the insidious effect pokies were having. On learning what the NRA had achieved in the national psyche by shifting the right to bear arms from a collective right about freedom to an individual right to freedom, the Australian gambling industry developed the slogan: *Gamble Responsibly*. They turned the responsibility for gambling from a collective responsibility through government policy and regulation to one of individual responsibility – each individual must bear the responsibility for protecting themselves from the insidious, addictive effects of poker machines.

I explore this because in this list of evil intentions we find something we might classify gambling under; and that's *avarice*. The dictionary describes avarice as: *extreme greed for wealth of material gain*.

So given that we have been fed the narrative *gamble responsibly* the gambling industry wants us to believe that the choice, yes the choice, to gamble is purely an individual one, and that those who get into gambling debt are constitutionally flawed, weak, irresponsible, maybe even with an evil heart. Certainly, in terms of the gamble responsibly narrative, derelict in *their* responsibility to their family, their employer, their bank, whoever.

Tim reminded us that what playing the pokies does, an activity which requires no skill at all, is that the machines are programmed in such a way as to release endorphins in the brain; give us a happy buzz; jingle our worries away, sooth us, at least for a moment.

The constitutional weakness which we have been led to believe is an individual gambling addict's weakness we can also then translate to other addictions – drug use, alcohol addiction, sexual addictions, work addictions, financial obsessiveness around money, both overspending and miserliness, perfectionism and a need to be in control. All these have an addictive compulsion behind them to sooth and settle the inner distress. While we see some of these things as a societal problem and we launch wars against them – bring in the NRA – it is individuals who are impacted, families which are torn apart by consequences of the addictive behaviour. The addict as seen as the weak link; the irresponsible one.

Over the last decades it has become clear through a deepening understanding of psychology and other scientific fields that there is an abiding, underlying element present across all forms of addictions and that is of the presence of shame in the individual story. I don't venture here lightly, because I know addiction is in some of your stories in tragic and painful ways; years ago and still present now.

The thing about shame is it a mantle which individuals are given, too often in childhood, which says to them – sometimes in words – but often in non-verbal, often pre-verbal, and visceral ways that they are unworthy at the very core of their being. Indeed, shame has been so much of our socialisation process as a means to control behaviour. And shame begets shame. As bullies are usually been reared by bullies, if an individual's life is crippled by shame it is likely that shame is part of the family tree. So often the result of some trauma in the past, the impact of which is passed down so often from generation to generation.

To sooth the pain of this trauma people find habits which release endorphins in the brain and take the pain away, albeit momentarily, but we become addicted to the hit, the high. Tim described the effect of an endorphin hit as more powerful than cocaine. Endorphins are natural pain relievers. They are “feel-good” chemicals because they can make you feel better and put you in a positive state of mind. Until they don't make you feel better because everything is falling apart.

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