

August 8th

Trinity 10

When you're watching an advert do you ever get the feeling that you may not be part of the target audience? Do you, indeed sometimes switch off, in your head if not with the remote? In which case you may not even have noticed last year's Phones4U campaign which had the strapline, "Great Deals 4 Popular People" Not, of course because you are not popular people, but because it was pitched largely at what I think most of us would have to call a significantly younger generation.

It ran for about six months in various guises – videos, TV ads, posters and so on, but the underlying idea was that always that if someone was popular enough to have 50 friends on their mobile phone they got a yes sticker and a special cheaper contract to reassure them how popular they were. Isn't that lovely? And there were some faintly entertaining ads featuring diverse skills and activities which finished in one of two ways. They either finished with "great deals for ..popular? people" and a no sticker for the more nerdy characters, or they finished, "great deals for popular people" and a yes sticker for the more charismatic types. Tempted to buy? No, me neither, but then as I say, I was not the target audience and the campaign was doing pretty well when all of a sudden they came a right cropper with one of their series of posters.

It featured a middle aged scout master shown stereotypically as grumpy, balding and with glasses. And of course he had a resounding no sticker – not enough friends on his phone, and of course, not popular enough for a phones 4U deal, poor chap. Well to its credit, the scouts association was immediately up in arms about this portrayal of its image and complaints rained in from all over, obliging the company to withdraw the image pretty sharpish. No offence meant, they claimed, and went back to concentrating on younger targets.

But doesn't your heart sing for the scout leader? Isn't it lovely to reflect that he just doesn't care about mobile phone companies! His heart is not set on the size of his contacts list, he has a totally different set of priorities. He isn't some insecure youth scratching around for a few more names to pretend to be his friends. And I have to say that if I found myself half way though one of my bike rides in the middle of nowhere with a buckled wheel and a broken ankle and in pouring rain who would I want to turn up alongside me? Well some young lad with a mobile phone to ring for help would do nicely actually.

But you get the drift. We all have different things we are drawn to, different priorities... and it might be interesting to reflect on which adverts wake us up or catch our attention. It might tell us something about where our treasure lies. Personally, I'm a sucker for the holiday ads.

So let's have a closer look at this passage which Jesus concludes "where your treasure is, there your heart will be also." We get so used to scripture quotes that it rarely occurs to us that we might not know what they mean. Because in fact, it's quite weird. Do I buy a Gloucester season ticket and then decide that my heart is with Gloucester rugby club? I don't think so. My heart is with Gloucester, metaphorically speaking, so I buy my treasured Gloucester season ticket each year. And if someone were to give me *their* treasured Bath season ticket would my heart go to Bath? I seriously doubt it. Surely our treasure follows our hearts.

It's almost as though he's saying – if your heart is in the wrong place, move your treasure and your heart will follow it. It is a thought – if you have shares in BP, I bet you've been following their fortunes in the gulf of Mexico with particular interest recently. So is it being suggested that we have to invest in the things of God before we'll really get to treasure them. Well, maybe so. Just prior to this we hear: Do not be afraid, little flock, for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom. Again, this is one of those fine sounding lines which we think we understand in a vaguely spiritual way. We're much too savvy to take it literally - though living in nice houses in Colwall many of us might feel that we already have been given the kingdom – but that would be to play the rich fool wouldn't it? We understand that we can't take our good fortune for granted - the challenge comes immediately – sell your possessions and give to the poor. Could we? Should we? Do we? But do we understand what the reward is – this kingdom, this treasure? I hope that some of us do, at least in the sense that if after years of trying, years of investment in God's way you begin to get some glimmer of it's beauty in the way you think, the things you value and the things you love, then perhaps you can whisper a quiet alleluia, your investment, your faithfulness have not been in vain.

It's difficult though, and hard to explain – in today's world, the kingdom is not an obvious number one on many people's want list and we're not talking about instant reward here. But maybe we're looking at it slightly wrongly – understandably so in our society which for better or for worse places much more emphasis on the individual than do or did many other cultures. We assume Jesus is talking to us, me personally, where is my

treasure? When do I get my return? In fact I gather this is a plural your, not a polite form like a French votre, but clearly addressed to a number of people, your treasure, your hearts, collectively. This is partly evident from Peter's later question – were you talking to us or them?, but apparently the grammar also makes this clear.

It raises an interesting question as to whether multiple hearts can have one treasure? Well of course they can – a happy marriage, a loving relationship, even a friendship, all are examples of two individuals sharing the same ..thing whatever you like to think of it as. And it's not like sharing the paper where you have to take it in turns, it really is two people having this .. treasure thing at the same time all the time.

It's tempting to look to sports teams for another example and maybe a football team, say, does occasionally come close to being 11 people with one treasured identity of sorts. But suddenly you're faced with the business of rivalry to be in the team and all that stuff, and I'd venture to suggest that as soon as you think rivalry you're not thinking kingdom, either individually or corporately. It's probably not the time to explore that idea now, that's one for another occasion and I guess a good team is a shared treasure really.

So we come inevitably to the church I suppose – multiple hearts with one treasure? Is that us? Yes, no, what do you think? Well, it may still be a work in progress, as they say, but it isn't a bad aspiration, and we probably aren't doing too badly. To the extent that we are a community which serves and includes and supports and allows people to explore what really matters to them and be thankful, well yes we are, multiple hearts with one treasure.

It's interesting, isn't it, that a mobile phone company should base a campaign on personal popularity rather than on how good the phones are. Advertisers know for sure that the things people value go way beyond personal possessions. So maybe Phones4U and Great deals for popular people has the makings of a mini parable for our times. Good campaign until they got the target wrong. It should have been great deals for all people, and while that may not work for a phone company, it's not a bad strapline for a church. Let's be sure to value our treasure.