

Fit for purpose

The envy trap

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"Envy comes from people's ignorance of, or lack of belief in, their own gifts" (Jean Vanier)

So, what is envy? Hieronymus Bosch in this illustration (from his *Seven Deadly Sins*) shows how envy is driven by awareness, not of self, but others: the couple envy the rich man (with servant) walking past; the young girl seems more intent on the purse than the young man carrying it and a dog has eyes only for the bone he doesn't have. How do we counter such approaches in our culture, even in our own lives?



Why do we envy? Does it, as Jean Vanier suggests, indicate just a lack of self-awareness? The key to avoiding envy seems to involve focussing on the positives rather than simply trying to 'not envy' – to be confident we are doing what God has called us to.

Read Psalm 37:1-9 and 37-40

The complete psalm is in the form of an acrostic Hebrew poem and is thought to have been written by David in his old age. Read it all if you have time.

As well as the envy of the rich and powerful envisioned by the David in this psalm, in what ways are we prey to envy of those more gifted within the church? It is sad when envy (for the best of reasons!!) can creep into our life together. Paul, of course, likened such thoughts to parts of the body discussing their worth – 1 Corinthians 12:12-26). How do we truly take on board the idea that if our call is truly from God, whether that is to be Pope or postman then the calling is of equal worth and value?

The nature of this calling for all was highlighted in the recent Bath and Wells programme *God calls everyone, everywhere*¹. If you want to look deeper into this area, then the Church of England published a short book titled *Kingdom Calling*. It's on sale in hard copy but can be downloaded from their website².

Stephen Cottrell writing in this book says *"We are reminded that it is important we recognize the variety of ministries each of us is called to exercise – social, relational and ministerial – and to celebrate the richness of these without creating a hierarchy. Ministry is about our life and witness in every aspect of our daily life – not just the things we do in church."* What should that mean for St James in 2022?

Read James 3:3-18

James casts his net wider, but surely much of the misuse of the tongue outlined in the first verses of the passage would have been driven by envy. His guidance is again insightful – the best way to avoid envy is to focus on the positives as described in verse 17. How, practically, can we achieve this?

"Love ... does not envy" (1 Corinthians 13:4)

¹ <https://www.bathandwells.org.uk/faith/everyday-faith/god-calls-everyone-everywhere/>

² <https://www.churchofengland.org/sites/default/files/2020-10/Kingdom%20Calling%20Web%20Version.pdf>