

"Success"

Grove Presbyterian Church

8 November, 2009

Industrial Revolution ruined us: progress measured by empirical gain - things replaced the soul.

So wrote a young man.

It is a Love-Hate relationship with our machines. Who hasn't wanted to toss their computer out the window?

John Henry, the steel driving man, versus the steam powered drilling machine.

*John Henry told his captain
"Lord a man ain't noth' but a man
But before I let that steam drill
beat me down
I'm gonna die with a hammer
in my hand, Lord, Lord
I'll die with a hammer in my hand"*

Metropolis - urban dystopia - the ruling class enjoying the eternal gardens, workers without names only numbers in the undercity operating the machines

Charlie Chaplin and his film, Modern Times, the tramp mindlessly endlessly tightening bolts on the assembly line, caught up in the gears. Ah yes: who works for whom? Yet, waxing the irony, it was a machine that allowed the film to be filmed.

Star Trek's Kirk and "The Ultimate Computer:"

Captain James T. Kirk: Secure from general quarters.

Wesley: Our complements to the M5 unit and regards to Captain Dunsell. Wesley out.

Dr. McCoy: Dunsell, who the blazes is Captain Dunsell? What does it mean, Jim? Spock? What does it mean?

Mr. Spock: Dunsell, Doctor, is a term used by midshipmen at Star Fleet Academy, it refers to a part which serves no useful purpose.

Then there's The Hitchhiker Guide to the Galaxy seeking the "Answer to the Ultimate Question of Life, the Universe, and Everything" from the super-computer, Deep Thought. It takes

Deep Thought $7\frac{1}{2}$ million years to compute and check the answer. Answer: 42. Don't panic!

Or The Matrix with humans best as batteries to feed the sentient machines.

Hal on 2001 a Space Odyssey: "I'm afraid. I'm afraid, Dave."

Transformers and the war between the heroic Autobots and the evil Decepticons

It's Love-Hate with our machines. But, please, don't take them away from me.

No Luddite am I. Luddites: textile workers back in England in the early 19th century ticked off by the gentry bosses replacing them with machines, so they destroyed the mechanized looms.

There is a movement afoot. Cleverer than the Luddites bashing inventions. One of our recent book club books - Three Cups of Tea -- mentioned it. How the founder and director of the International Society for Ecology and Culture quotes the king of Bhutan, who says the true measure of a nation's success is not gross national product, but "gross national happiness."

If fact, there is a survey with metrics to measure more than such things as a nation's consumption; it measures the level of a society's satisfaction in seven areas:

1. Economic satisfaction (savings, debt and purchase power)
2. Environmental satisfaction: (pollution, noise and traffic)
3. Workplace satisfaction (job satisfaction, motivation, ethics, conflict)
4. Physical health (Severe illnesses, overweight)
5. Mental health (usage of antidepressants, self-esteem, positive outlook)
6. Social satisfaction [including family and relationship satisfaction] (domestic disputes, communication, support, sex, discrimination, safety, divorce rates, complaints of domestic conflicts and family lawsuits, public lawsuits, crime rates)
7. Political satisfaction (quality of local democracy, individual freedom, and foreign conflicts)

What's missing? Number 8: the spiritual metric. Life determined by the divine to which all life belongs.

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Now, some things from the industrial revolution I really like. Miatas. Penicillin. My George Forman Grill.

So is the culprit really the industrial revolution? Or is the culprit is the old god with new names. Mammon? Consumption? Conspicuous consumption? Consuming our way to happiness? The terrible god Molech demanding child sacrifice?

The NASDAQ is back  
And the AMEX pays for my duplex  
Of course the SSRB depends on the PIA (that ruthless fiscal Ayatollah)

So how's my COLA?  
Payola from the GNP

GDP  
S&P  
FRB  
FTC  
SEC  
GHG  
CD  
POD  
OD  
YTD

Free ATM?  
Not with my SSN  
Or PIN  
TIN  
NNI  
SSI

Supply side day for the EPA and DJIA  
401(K)  
IRA  
Laying woes for the NGO's  
But never the CEO's, CFO's, COO's, CTO's, CMO's, CIO's, or CCO's,

Is there plenty of dough from the EIS to report to the IRS?  
No, sadly: NSF...

The Molech of our age. The power of things lies not in themselves but in what we make of them, the power over us we give them.

If we have learned anything these last years of curious economy, let it be that we are better than materialism.

Martin Luther King, Jr.: **We must rapidly begin the shift from a "thing-oriented" society to a "person-oriented" society. When machines and computers, profit motives and property rights are considered more important than people, the giant triplets of racism, materialism, and militarism are incapable of being conquered.**

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What is your measure of success?

What will it take for you to look on your life and say, "I've been really successful?"

Well, how does what you would say compare with how Jesus would describe a successful life?

He'd probably quote the prophets or sing a psalm:

*Give justice to the weak and the orphan;
maintain the right of the lowly and the destitute.
Rescue the weak and the needy;
deliver them from the hand of the wicked.'*
---Psalm 82: 3-4

Or he might quote himself.

Listen: Matthew 6: 24-34

'No one can serve two masters; for a slave will either hate the one and love the other, or be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and wealth.

Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat or what you will drink, or about your body, what you will wear. Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothing? Look at the birds of the air; they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not of more value than they? And can any of you by worrying add a single hour to your span of life? And why do you worry about clothing? Consider the

lilies of the field, how they grow; they neither toil nor spin, yet I tell you, even Solomon in all his glory was not clothed like one of these. But if God so clothes the grass of the field, which is alive today and tomorrow is thrown into the oven, will he not much more clothe you—you of little faith? Therefore do not worry, saying, "What will we eat?" or "What will we drink?" or "What will we wear?" For it is the Gentiles who strive for all these things; and indeed your heavenly Father knows that you need all these things. But strive first for the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well.

'So do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will bring worries of its own. Today's trouble is enough for today.

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*Worry is a rocking chair, it goes back and forth but it gets no where.*

What a terrible word is 'worry.' Anxious. Pulled apart apart in different directions. Piranha days. The way a cat worries a mouse. Self-stress. Literally: strangulation.

Avoid mistaking this with due concern or prudence. That's fair. That's useful. Here among the lilies of the fields is no recipe for indolence or immobility. But Jesus warns against the kind of fretful worry that strangles you. When your stomach is in a knot because you think you can control the situation. When you grind your teeth or your muscles turn tight. Can't sleep. Headaches. Anger.

Where does fretful anxiety come from? Answer: when we spend our energies on manipulating others and the world into us getting our expectations. All that getting. The demons of expectations. The stress produced when we keep expecting others to act they way we want them to act. When we stress ourselves out trying to manipulate even good expectations. It still is manipulation. And the disappointment and dissatisfaction when it doesn't happen.

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"Success"

To laugh often and love much
 To win the respect of intelligent people
 and the affection of honest critics
 To endure the betrayal of false friends

To appreciate beauty
 To find the best in others
 To give of one's self
 To leave the world a bit better, whether by a healthy child,
 a garden patch, or a redeemed social condition
 To have played and laughed with enthusiasm
 and sung with exultation
 To know even one life has breathed easier
 because you have lived
 This is to have succeeded

*-- a quotation with variations, inaccurately though fondly
 attributed to Emerson, reprinted from Thomas Tapscott's
 graduation program*

What makes you rich?

Or we can rephrase this: who makes you rich?

If you could change one thing that causes you worry, what would it be?

How do you handle worry?

I am reminded of a conversation ages ago with a really well to do couple; how the wife mentioned how much happier they were in their first home, a one room walk-up.

And the poorest man I know is the indifferent man.

And I am mindful, indeed, indicted at how Jesus compares worry, stress, anxiety, with faithlessness.

Jesus has his own gospel of success. A bit of a puzzle considering how some preachers preach prosperity today, when you consider Jesus did not choose the mighty but the weak. He chose Bethlehem not Rome, the cross not a crown.

I love the irony: the most successful man in the history of the world ends up crucified and despised.

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So if Jesus could have minutes with you talking about your life, what would he say to you?