



ourcommunity.com.au
Where not-for-profits go for help



What Makes a Life Worth Living?

Communities in Control Conference: The Lucky Country
Conference

Melbourne, 27 May, 2014

Presentation by

Hugh Mackay

Psychologist, social researcher extraordinaire, multi award-winning author

HUGH MACKAY

Good morning everybody. I'd like to begin by just inviting you to think back for a moment to the 20th of March, which of course is a big day in your memory.

It was prominently marked in your diary, you did something celebratory - the 20th of March? Blank looks all around the room ... it was World Happiness Day.

How did that pass you by? I think that was the day when we were supposed to go around telling everyone to cheer up or perhaps it was the day when we were supposed to pretend that life is not the way life is.

We were supposed to pretend that there are no friends who let you down, no relationships that collapse, no bereavements, no illnesses, no shadows across our lives.

Perhaps it was a day when we were supposed to chant that ridiculous mantra of positive psychologists "the glass is half full". Well you know all about the optimist and the pessimist. I'm attracted to the engineer who looked at that glass and said "that glass is exactly twice as big as it needs to be" and I think that kind of realistic assessment is more attractive.

Well World Happiness Day, it could have been a day when you ate more yoghurt, and in case you think I'm nuts, on the packet of yoghurt that I eat it says "happy inside, happy outside" so if happiness is your goal, get into the yoghurt.

And there is of course a well documented relationship between mood and food. We all know that we feel better on a full tummy and the world looks like a better place and when we're hungry we're often also a bit cranky.

In fact some research was recently published in the UK documenting the decisions made by a parole board about prisoners coming before the board

2

If quoting from this speech, please acknowledge that it was presented to the 2014 Communities in Control Conference
Convened by Our Community & CatholicCare, May 27, 2014
www.ourcommunity.com.au/cic



before and after lunch – the point of the study was to assess the impact of lunch.

I'm sure you can guess the results of the study. The prisoners who came before the board after lunch received much more generous and lenient treatment from the board than the poor mugs who turned up when the board was hungry.

So I'm not sure what we do with that sort of information except if you're ever in that situation, do try and get an afternoon appointment.

Well we have world everything day don't we? In a few months you'll be celebrating World Menopause Day, that's something to look forward to.

So why not World Happiness Day? Well let me tell you why I think we shouldn't be celebrating World Happiness Day, and I begin by saying I'm not against happiness - everybody loves feeling happy in those occasional fleeting moments when it happens but it seems to me that our society is currently in the grip of a very modern form of madness in which we've decided that the pursuit of personal happiness is a suitable goal for our lives.

It is as though we should be asking ourselves, monitoring ourselves constantly to see whether we're happy or happy enough? I think this pursuit of personal happiness has become one of the great distractions from the good life.

One of the great distractions from the question 'what makes a life worth living?' as if happiness, a particular emotional state, is supposed to be a symptom of goodness. Well sometimes it might be and sometimes it won't be and what I want to suggest to you this morning is it's a completely irrelevant question to raise if you're interested in goodness.

There are a lot of things wrong with this idea that we're going to enshrine happiness as the goal of our lives. One thing that's wrong with it is of course if that actually was the goal of your life, it wouldn't be too hard to achieve it.

Our emotions are very easy to manipulate, people are at it all the time - politicians, preachers, poets, parents, partners - I didn't mean to be so alliterative, but all these people are trying to influence our emotional state, film makers, musicians. Not hard to do, if you want to cheer yourself up just play the appropriate track of music - avoid Leonard Cohen. Watch a film that you know is going to cheer you up or if you feel like a good weep, there are plenty of films that will do that for you as well. And if none of that works, well there's an entire pharmacological industry at your disposal with drugs, legal and illegal, capable of creating just the emotional state you're looking for if that's what you want.

It seems to be no accident by the way, no mere coincidence that we've seen the explosion in the recreational drug industry at precisely the same time as we've seen the explosion in the happiness industry, as though 'well if happiness is how we're supposed to be feeling, what can I do to get there?' But the real problem with all this is that it neglects what I think is one of the great blessings of being human which is that we have at our disposal a full spectrum of human emotions and unless we experience the full spectrum, we don't know what it means to be human.

Unless we've known sadness we'll never recognise happiness when it visits us. The idea of triumph or success makes no sense at all unless you've experienced failure and disappointment, unless you've been frustrated by the tedium of passages of your life, you won't be able to recognise what some of the chirpier emotions are about.

And hasn't our folk law always got it right? Our folk law has never said "we learn most about ourselves when we're happy" in fact the opposite, haven't we all

4

If quoting from this speech, please acknowledge that it was presented to the 2014 Communities in Control Conference
Convened by Our Community & CatholicCare, May 27, 2014
www.ourcommunity.com.au/cic



been told and haven't we told our partners and friends or our children "we grow through pain" "adversity is the great teacher" we know that's true and yet in this current climate, this peculiar stage we're in in our culture at the moment, when the pain comes we want a pill or a drink or a trip or something that will take the pain away as though we haven't got time to learn the lessons that pain might have to teach us.

I'm sure you remember the example of James Magnussen, the Australian champion swimmer at the London Olympics. He failed so spectacularly in the heat of the men's 4x100m relay. You might also remember that the following day at a press conference Magnussen said he'd learned more about himself in those 24 hours than he had in the preceding 20 years.

I'm sure we can all relate to that. What sort of events in your life have taught you most about who you are and about what it means to be human and almost certainly they are some of the dark passages, some of the troughs that we all go through. Which does not of course mean that we need to go through life looking for opportunities to fail or for things that are bound to make us unhappy so we can learn from pain and sadness and so on, that would be a very neurotic way to live your life.

But you don't have to go looking for this stuff, it's out there and it's going to come to us whether we want it or not and it's going to come to our children whether we want it for them or not.

This is why I get a bit unnerved when I hear, as I so often do, parents saying of their children "I just want my kids to be happy" as though that's the sole goal they have for their kids. Now you wouldn't expect parents to say "I just want my kids to be sad" "but "I just want my kids to be happy" of course it all depends on what we mean by happiness.

And yes there are many ways of defining that term. If we go back to the ancient Greeks which is the sort of thing we do when we're trying to examine concepts like this, they had a lot to say about something that in the Greek the word is 'Eudaimonia' popularly translated as happiness but when you look at what the Greek's Aristotle in particular who wrote extensively about Eudaimonia, when you look at what he's talking about he's not talking about our emotional state at all.

What he's talking about is people living virtuously, people fully engaged as citizens with the society they live in.

They are people who are living according to a sense of purpose, and in one of my favourite phrases, people who are fully experiencing the richness of human love and friendship.

Well I'm sure everyone in the room has experienced the full richness of human love and friendship and we all know that this is not all sweetness and light. The full richness of human love and friendship entails pain and frustration and disappointment, that's what it's like and that's part of the same.

So when I hear parents saying "I just want my kids to be happy" I feel like tapping them on the shoulder and saying "so you mean you want your kids to live virtuously? You want your kids to be fully engaged as citizens? You want them to live in accordance with their sense of purpose?"

I don't think that's what they mean at all. I think what they mean is they want their kids to avoid pain and sadness. They want their kids to be emotionally buoyant.

They're perhaps the sort of parents who when their children are down a bit perhaps shedding a few tears will say to them "come on, give us a smile" as though all I want from you is a smile. I only want you to be happy.

6

If quoting from this speech, please acknowledge that it was presented to the 2014 Communities in Control Conference
Convened by Our Community & CatholicCare, May 27, 2014
www.ourcommunity.com.au/cic



Well what sort of preparation is that for what we know life is going to be like?

Surely rather than wanting our kids to be happy, we should be wanting them to be whole. We should be wanting to teach them the resilience they will need to cope with everything at every point on the emotional spectrum because all that stuff will come to them. In any case we know what it's like to be just happy.

I'm sure you've been through periods in your life, some of you might be in the midst of this right now, a period in your life when you're just happy.

The most obvious example of that is when you have newly fallen in love and if you've recently fallen in love I hope you're enjoying it. This rosy glow doesn't last forever, love can last forever but the romantic sense of being in love is a fleeting thing and it lasts typically between six months and two years so the biologists tell us.

And people who study this phenomenon tell us "well people who are in love, they're just happy. They're almost euphoric" they're also virtually dysfunctional. This is the period in their lives when they're crashing into things and losing the keys and making appalling misjudgements about all sorts of things especially of course each other.

In fact Jo Forgas from the University of NSW has been studying all of this and he's come to the conclusion, and it's a very significant conclusion for some of the other things I want to say in a moment, but he's come to the conclusion that we are at our cognitive best, we're at our sharpest and we're making our best decisions, we're more likely to be generous, we're more likely to be compassionate and selfless when we are feeling slightly unhappy.

Now he doesn't mean when we're depressed, he means when the needle is just slightly to the negative side of the middle of that emotional spectrum.

7

If quoting from this speech, please acknowledge that it was presented to the 2014 Communities in Control Conference
Convened by Our Community & CatholicCare, May 27, 2014
www.ourcommunity.com.au/cic



Communities in Control
One of the 16 Knowledge Centres
of Our Community.



ourcommunity.com.au
Where not-for-profits go for help

I attended a conference a couple of years ago where an American psychologist said “next time you go to the doctor, in order to get a really good diagnosis, give your doctor a piece of chocolate before he or she attempts the diagnosis so they’ll get a little sugar hit, a little burst of euphoria and you’ll get a better diagnosis.”

Well I thought about Jo Forgas’s work and I thought that is exactly the opposite of what I want, I don’t want a doctor feeling euphoric saying “everything will be fine, don’t worry”. I’d like my doctor to be feeling just slightly unhappy at the time when the diagnosis is made.

Well all this strange stuff about how we need to be pursuing happiness as though it’s our birthright, our entitlement, as though it’s almost the default position for humans and there’s something wrong with us if we’re not in that state.

It’s part of, as I said earlier, a modern madness which I’ve called in my new book “the utopia complex” it’s part of this crazy idea that we’re entitled to some kind of utopia on earth which will be marked by happiness, it will be marked by a towering self of steam and if we’re suffering from the utopia complex we’ll think that the greatest gift we can give our children is towering self-esteem, whether it’s warranted or not, make them feel terrific about themselves.

Excellence, have you noticed everything is the centre for excellence? I’m delighted that Denis hasn’t got a poster up, I hope he hasn’t, saying “excellence in community service or something.”

But you see this everywhere, used car yards, schools, they’re all centres for excellence in something.

Well we all do our best and occasionally what we do is excellent but there’s part of this idea that everything has got to be fantastic. Even perfection is within our

8

If quoting from this speech, please acknowledge that it was presented to the 2014 Communities in Control Conference
Convened by Our Community & CatholicCare, May 27, 2014
www.ourcommunity.com.au/cic



reach, perfect teeth. When you're dealing with a society in the grip of the utopia complex, get into orthodontistry if you want to make a fortune - everybody wants to have straight gleaming white teeth regardless of their age or what their teeth have been through.

Perfect skin - the Botox revolution of course is part of the same modern madness.

The perfect latte, I'm sure you know where you can find the perfect latte and you wouldn't go anywhere else. Perfect sex of course, perfect marriages and if they're not perfect then ditch them and have a perfect divorce and have another go.

Outcomes always have to be positive and when the tough stuff comes, shed it because it might make you unhappy.

Well our language has changed to reflect this, have you noticed how now everything has to be fantastic, fabulous, awesome? Friday afternoon someone is going to say to you "have an awesome weekend" and if you were planning just to curl up with a book and veg out for the weekend, don't admit it because that doesn't sound too awesome.

I signed my name on a credit card voucher in a restaurant recently and the waiter watched me signing my name and then he said "fabulous" <laughs> and I had another look and I thought 'I wonder what was fabulous about that?' and I looked again and it was quite legible and I hadn't fallen below the line so maybe this was unusual but I thought 'fabulous' was pushing it.

But that's how we talk now. We talk as though everything has to be fantastic. I drove past a school in the central west of NSW recently, a primary school, and the sign out the front - they all have signs out the front these days, the sign out the front of the school said "every child in this school is extraordinary" and I

9

If quoting from this speech, please acknowledge that it was presented to the 2014 Communities in Control Conference
Convened by Our Community & CatholicCare, May 27, 2014
www.ourcommunity.com.au/cic



thought 'well this is a heavy burden to lay on these kids' and also that they'd just redefined the meaning of extraordinary.

If every child is extraordinary then no one is extraordinary. And I suppose if you're a bit above average you're awesome, and maybe they've already changed the sign? Maybe every child is awesome.

Well that of course points to the real problem about all of this – that we've gone crazy about all this stuff - happiness, excellence, perfection etc. We can look in the mirror and say "you're mad" but there are actually victims of this utopia complex and they are our children and our grandchildren.

The sort of kids who go to a school where it says "every child in this school is extraordinary" ... we can learn to swallow our disappointments, we can deal with our frustrations – but what is it like for a generation of children who are growing up in a world in which they are constantly being told they're special, in which they are being rewarded and praised for everything they do, in which they get prizes just for turning up?

They go to a party and play pass the parcel, some of you are old enough to remember when there was only one prize in pass the parcel, now every layer that's opened is a prize and there's a parent monitoring the music making sure every child gets a turn so no one can experience disappointment. I assume they've had to abandon musical chairs because someone has to be disappointed there.

Well what about children who grow up in this world who receive gold stars for stand upright and breathing? The answer is that at some point this is a generation who are going to experience a very sharp reality check when it begins to dawn on them that this is not the way the world is, and that they are perhaps not as special as their parents kept telling them they were.

10

If quoting from this speech, please acknowledge that it was presented to the 2014 Communities in Control Conference
Convened by Our Community & CatholicCare, May 27, 2014
www.ourcommunity.com.au/cic



They're going to hit late adolescence or early adulthood and find there are lots of special people and a lot of them are more special than they are. That it's possible to fail exams when you get to university, although a lot of universities are making it quite hard, especially if you've paid fees, to fail exams.

A boyfriend can dump you for no apparent reason. You can feel blue for a week for no reason. All these things will happen - well what happened to perfection? What happened to me being special?

Well an American psychologist recently published an article in *The Atlantic*, the title of the article was 'how to land your kids in therapy' and the prescription for landing your kids in therapy was pretty much what I've been describing.

Teach them that happiness is their birthright, try to get them always to be cheerful, tell them constantly that they're special, praise them for everything and they will hit the wall eventually and they may find it quite traumatic when they realise they can't actually be whatever they want to be or do whatever they want to do.

So we're beginning to see that there are some holes in this whole happiness movement and in this whole idea that the good life is about feeling good. In fact some of the famous positive psychologists are publishing material that challenges some of the popular interpretations of positive psychology.

Martin Seligman, the author of *Learned Optimism*, the father of positive psychology - his most recent research paper published reports on what are the good predictors of high school performance in adolescence?

He points out that self esteem is not a good predictor at all, that it's virtually irrelevant and that the best predictor of high school success, even a better predictor by the way than intelligence - a rather controversial conclusion - that

the best predictor is self control, self discipline, the ability postpone gratification and to settle down and get on with it.

Daniel Gilbert, a Harvard psychologist, has also been studying this whole question of what brings us great satisfaction and contributes to a fulfilling life and so on.

He's also come to the conclusion that it's got absolutely nothing to do with happiness but everything to do with a sense of meaningfulness in your lives. He quotes the examples of parents, some of the parents in this room might relate to this. Gilbert said "most parents report that they are at their happiest when they are not with their children, when they're out for dinner or off seeing a movie or playing golf or something.

But that the richest sense of meaningfulness in their lives comes from their role as parents" now even if you're not a parent I'm sure you can get that perhaps in relation to work? Very few people skip to work on Monday morning whistling merry tunes about the joys of the workplace and the wonderful people I work with and how my workplace cup is overflowing with happiness.

Maybe some people feel like that but most of us don't because we don't look to work as a source of happiness but we do look to work as a source of meaningfulness in our lives. So pretty clearly what I'm saying is that if you're interested in what makes a life worth living, if you're interested in the concept of the good life, it won't have anything to do with happiness. It won't have anything to do with feeling good in the same ways it won't have anything to do with doing well in a financial sense. It won't have anything to do with how financially secure or materially prosperous you might be.

When I talk about the good life, when I talk about the life that's worth living, I'm talking about goodness in the simplest most basic moral sense of the word - that

the good life is a life characterised by goodness. The morally praise worthy life, the life devoted to the common good.

And the first step on the pathway to this kind of goodness is of course to acknowledge the central truth about the good life which is that it is a life lived for others.

That's not an opinion, consult every philosophical tradition on earth, consult every religious tradition on earth and they'll all point you to that simple proposition - that goodness is all about our relationship with other people.

What else could it be about? Our moral sense is a social sense. We develop a sense of morality from the experience of having to relate to other people. So the proposition that the good life is a life lived for others I think is capable of being logically proved as long as you accept my first proposition.

And the first proposition flows from this question which is "what do you think is the source of goodness in human life?" just think about all the things you most admire in yourself and in other people. The sort of things you are most likely to praise and appreciate in other people. The sort of things we would think of as goodness expressed in other people.

Now this of course is things like kindness, respect, compassion, tolerance, social inclusion - all of those things. Where do they all spring from? Now the answer is pretty obvious isn't it? They all spring from the word I'd like to use is 'love'. You mightn't like the word love, you might want to talk about 'charity', a charitable disposition. When I use the word 'love' of course I'm not using it in an emotional sense at all, I'm using it in a motivational sense. That things like kindness and respect and compassion and tolerance spring from a loving disposition that has nothing to do with whether we like people or not, it has to do with a charitable view of the world. A framework which is loving in its current day.

13

If quoting from this speech, please acknowledge that it was presented to the 2014 Communities in Control Conference
Convened by Our Community & CatholicCare, May 27, 2014
www.ourcommunity.com.au/cic



So if that's the source of goodness then the second proposition is simply to acknowledge that you can't make sense of that idea, you can't make sense of the charitable disposition without setting it in the community context. It's all about our engagement with other people and it's not about anything else. You can't have a loving disposition in an empty room unless you're a narcissist and you like gazing in the mirror and loving yourself, fine see a therapist.

But for most of us it's only about our relationships, we don't make any sense of the idea of loving kindness, we don't make any sense of the idea of charity except in the context of our personal relationships. So if the loving disposition, the charitable disposition is the source of goodness and that is only about relationships, only about engagement and only about community then the conclusion obviously is that the good life must be about those things, must be about engagement, cooperation and being part of a functioning community.

What else would the good life possibly be about? And that of course does not come as a shock to anyone in the room, we all know that the desire to do good in the world and the desire to cooperate is part of who we are - part of the human nature.

We're constantly being told the opposite of course, aren't you sick of being told how everything we do is driven by self interest? That we are by nature competitive, ruthless, self interested and even violent in the pursuit of our personal goals.

Of course that's true, we all know about the war that goes on within us between our selfish and selfless character, it's all there - we are driven by self-interest but we're not only driven by self interest and indeed the more we look into it, the more the neuroscientists and the anthropologists and the social psychologists look into this, the more they are driven to the simple conclusion that the deepest truth about human beings is not that we are driven by self interest but

14

If quoting from this speech, please acknowledge that it was presented to the 2014 Communities in Control Conference
Convened by Our Community & CatholicCare, May 27, 2014
www.ourcommunity.com.au/cic



that we are by nature a cooperative species like most other species on the planet.

Yes we're both selfish and selfless but our selflessness is the deepest truth about us.

It's very interesting that during the 20th century we chose to misinterpret a very significant proverb in our culture, the proverb is "charity begins at home" and I'm sure when you hear people say "charity begins at home" you know that what they're thinking is "look after yourself first, look after your own family and your own circle and once you've got that sorted then you can extend your charity further afield".

Well "charity begins at home" - which is a biblical proverb - doesn't mean that at all. It refers to early childhood intervention. What it's talking about is the charitable disposition that is in all of us must be nurtured in children while they are young and at home, nurturing charity begins in the home. It's got nothing to do with being selfish first.

Well this charitable impulse is in all of us, we know it's in all of us. We know when we're called upon to act almost all of us will act well, possibly even heroically well. You do hear of people who jump in off a wharf fully clothed to rescue a child in distress in the water or someone who goes to the aid of somebody who is being attacked by a shark or runs into a burning building.

I mean there are all these things and what happens when someone does a remarkable altruistic act that seems to count as heroism? Some reporter will shove a microphone in their face and say "how does it feel? Why did you do that?" and you know what they will say because they all say the same thing, they always say "anyone would have done it"

Now that's not some kind of mock modesty, that is an accurate description of what human beings are like. Anyone would have done it.

When Brisbane was inundated by those floods, bus loads - hundreds and hundreds of total strangers came into Brisbane with their mops and buckets to help people clean up - that's just what human beings do. And if they don't do that, if someone falls down in the street and people walk past and ignore them or someone dies in their house unnoticed, it makes the media. It's a reportable incident because it's so uncharacteristic of human nature.

We are by nature kind people, we take refugees into our homes, we volunteer, we care for people who are frail and sick and elderly, we have concern for the marginalised if those impulses are nurtured within us and if we have appropriate leadership that encourages us to nurture those impulses as well. I was talking about this to a group of people in Albury in NSW recently and a woman in the audience said "yes my mother is old and frail and she's almost blind and she gets around Albury with a white stick. She says people are extraordinarily helpful to her as soon as they see the white stick. In fact she's been assisted across several streets that she never intended to cross" - well if you're going to make a mistake, that's not a bad mistake to make I suppose.

Anyway if all this idealistic talk about altruism doesn't convince you, there is simply a biological evolutionary argument you can make in favour of nurturing the community and fostering our cooperative impulses and that is to acknowledge that by nature human beings are social creatures.

Carl Rogers, one of my psychological heroes - now deceased, an American psycho therapist -- if you haven't read his collection called *On Becoming a Person* get it out at the library, in fact it's still in print. It's an inspiring collection of articles.

But Carl Rogers late in his career, reflecting on his work as a psychotherapist said that when any of his patients or clients came to a full realisation of who they are, it was always to understand that they were not individuals but they belonged somewhere. That they were a part of a network, a family, an organisation, a community, a neighbourhood.

And that points to perhaps one of the most beautiful, one of the most symmetrical truths about human nature which is that we are sustained by communities.

We're not solo operators, there are hermits and there are isolates who like to be disconnected from all of this but look how we live in cities and suburbs and towns and villages, we get together and congregate and cooperate, that's our nature. We need communities to sustain us but of course history tells us that communities don't just happen and communities don't necessarily survive just because we need them to.

They only survive if we in turn nurture them. They will only sustain us if we sustain them and that seems to me to be a central symmetry about human life.

So that leads to the pretty obvious final thought that if that's the kind of people we are, if that's how we do it, what do we need to do in order to nurture the communities that will sustain us?

Well again, to a room full of people in the business you're in, I don't think I really have to say anything more about that do I? Except perhaps to summarise the central idea that we nurture the communities that sustain us every time we treat someone else the way we would like to be treated.

Treating other people the way you'd like to be treated can seem controversial, it's not an absolutely inflexible rule and there are all sorts of cultural and generational and other differences that mean you have to tread a bit carefully -

17

If quoting from this speech, please acknowledge that it was presented to the 2014 Communities in Control Conference
Convened by Our Community & CatholicCare, May 27, 2014
www.ourcommunity.com.au/cic



Communities in Control
One of the 16 Knowledge Centres
of Our Community.



ourcommunity.com.au
Where not-for-profits go for help

not everyone wants to be treated exactly the way you want to be treated except at the deepest level, everyone wants to be taken seriously.

Everyone wants to be treated with kindness and respect regardless of how that might be expressed. And there again you find this truth at the heart of every moral system on earth, religious, philosophical, secular, wherever you look - everybody has come to the same conclusion about humans which is that we are sustained by communities and that we must nurture communities through altruism and through treating other people the way we'd like to be treated.

So if you're interested in living the good life, don't worry any more about how you're feeling moment to moment. Don't get obsessed with your personal happiness index, certainly don't worry about how much stuff you've accumulated obviously.

Don't even spend any more time worrying about the meaning of life with a capital 'L', you'll never get the answer.

Worry instead about the meaning of your own life, let the evolutionists and the biologists and the astronomers and others try and sort out the meaning, if there is meaning, of Life. The meaning of your own life is up to you, that's the purpose that we give ourselves in order to attach meaning to our own lives.

Worry about whether you gave someone your undivided attention when they needed it. Listening attentively is one of the great signs of goodness in your life. If you don't listen to someone, if you're glazing over while they're talking to you or looking over their shoulder in the hope of trying to find someone a bit more interesting to talk to, the message you're sending without having to spell it out is 'I don't take you seriously enough to bother listening to you'.

You wouldn't say that to your kids, you wouldn't say that to your partner or friends or colleagues but you do say it every time you withhold listening from them.

Worry about whether you apologised quickly enough or sincerely enough if you hurt or wronged or offended somebody else. It's funny in Australia at the moment how many people are making it almost an article of faith never to apologise as though that would be a sign of weakness, it would of course be the opposite - a sign of strength, a sign that I understand that by wronging someone else I've torn the social fabric and I need to repair it.

And equally of course if someone has wronged or offended me I need to be generous in my forgiveness.

So the greatest monument to any of our lives won't be in stone but it will be in the living legacy, the influence that we've had on other people at every point of connection with the human family.

You don't have to be rich to leave a positive legacy, you don't have to be famous or intelligent or powerful or even particularly well organised let alone happy. All you have to be is committed to the idea that we need to treat people the way we ourselves would like to be treated knowing not only that they will have been enriched by their encounter with us but that in the bigger picture, the community that sustains us will also have been nurtured.

Thank you.