**The Discipline of Simplicity**

Last week I had a laundry disaster, we have all had them, you take your washing off the line in a rush as it is beginning to rain, thankful that it has dried. Then you come to iron it and discover a revolting stain. So back in the wash it goes, rubbing in extra strong Vanish beforehand. But then, to your dismay, you realise the stain is still there – what do you do?

Six months ago I would have said “oh well, the duvet cover has done us well, we’ve had it 5 and half years - put it in the textile recycling bags and say goodbye on the next bin day”. But over the last year I have been really challenged to try and live a simpler and, as an effect greener, life. So, when Louise asked me if I would cover this week’s discipline of simple living, I jumped at the chance. However, the more I thought about it, the more I realised that when it comes to living simply there is a big difference between the generations.

I have grown up in the era of “Fast Fashion” and “Throw Away” culture - which I know is shocking to some of you here who likely grew up with the “Make Do and Mend” culture - looking after everything you own carefully and keeping everything as you “never know when it might come in handy”. Although this thinking is not instilled in my generation it is beginning to change. Sewing and clothing alteration classes are becoming more popular with the younger generation, who are often having to learn the skills for themselves instead of being taught by a parent before them. And who can forget knitting making a comeback? And not just for the females, thanks to Tom Daley a sizeable percentage of gentlemen are also taking up the needles! But why is this change happening?

Over our lifetime the world has changed - we now know about climate change and are experiencing the effects of global warming. We realise we need to do something about it. People are now much more conscious about the impact we have on the world. The most obvious effect of this awareness is recycling.

Firstly, I will hold my hand up and say we all have days where we are in a rush - it is rubbish day, we wake up late and can hear the refuse lorry approaching so we just chuck everything in the black bag and put it out. But in a general day to day situation, how do we recycle?

At funeral services we sometimes read 1 Timothy 6 “For we brought nothing into the world and can take nothing out.” A reminder to us that our earthly possessions are just that - they are here for us on earth. But our possessions and our actions leave a footprint that will remain after us. This has been where I have been challenged the most, and I am trying to make simple changes.

* I am ceasing buying cakes and biscuits, often in plastic packaging, and instead making my own. This often means it is healthier – so my waistline appreciates it - and it means I am creating less waste.
* I am trying to cut down on my clothes, mending what I can and, if I do buy new clothes, they are second hand or come from companies that have a high ethical rating.
* Instead of using cottonwool pads to take off my make up, I have switched to bamboo washable pads.
* Finally, when I need to replace my make-up and beauty products, I am now buying cruelty free items which, where possible, have a low carbon footprint. This is the most challenging for me, as it means finding lots of new products that suit my skin.

I know there’s lots more that I can do to live simply and leave less of a footprint in the world. Please feel free to share your experiences and tips – perhaps we can write an article in next month’s magazine? As for my washing disaster, although I’m a person who loves perfection, I’m trying to embrace contentment, and so will be dying my duvet cover and pillowcases. There’s still plenty of life left in the sheets, so why buy new ones?

As St Paul says *“I have learned to be content whatever the circumstances.**I know what it is to be in need, and I know what it is to have plenty. I have learned the secret of being content in any and every situation.”* (Philippians 4:11b-13a)

As Christians we’re called to be stewards of God’s creation - we don’t need to fill our life with so much ‘stuff’ but instead, like Paul, should learn to embrace contentment. We have our relationship with God to help guide and nudge us when we get that itch to perhaps buy yet another pair of shoes that we really don’t need. It’s not always easy - especially if you *really* like those shoes, and you just know they’d look *soooo* good with a particular outfit - but that’s why living simply is a spiritual discipline – it’s something that needs practice, and we will make mistakes. But don’t panic: God is with you as you try to live more simply. Isn’t that amazing!

Hannah Robinson