

Westgate Baptist Community
Sunday 12 September 10 am
A sermon by Geoff Wraight.

Come down, I want to spend some time with you..

Luke 19: 1-10

..... The road Jesus was on took him through the town of Jericho. There was a man named Zacchaeus there who was despised as a collaborator, because he had made his fortune collecting taxes for the Roman occupation forces. He was eager to lay eyes on Jesus, but so was everyone else and he couldn't see past the crowd because he was too short. So he nicked up the street a bit and climbed a tree in order to get a good view when Jesus came past. When Jesus got to that point on the road, he looked up and called out to him, "Zacchaeus, come on down. I need you to put me up at your place for the night."

..... Zacchaeus nearly fell out of his tree in his eagerness to welcome Jesus into his home. The onlookers, though, were outraged, and they began to grumble, "This Jesus has lost the plot. He's gone home with the scum of the earth."

..... Zacchaeus stood up and said to Jesus, "I'm turning over a new leaf, Lord. I am giving half of everything I own to the poor; and anybody I have ripped off, I am repaying four times over."

..... In reply, Jesus announced, "Salvation has become a reality in this house today. Just like his ancestor Abraham, this man is one of God's chosen ones. You see, the Son of Humanity has come to search for the lost and rescue them."

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It's hard to imagine there was ever a time when life moved faster than it does today. We find ourselves expected to "think faster, work faster, talk faster, read faster, write faster, eat faster, move faster".

In a recent article Ross Gittins suggests that the whole world's suffering from "time-sickness", a disease discovered by the American physician Larry Dossey. "Time Sickness" is the obsessive belief that "time is getting away, that there isn't enough of it, and that you must pedal faster and faster to keep up".

Some of us find the fast pace of life exhilarating. We humans are innately competitive and many of us are attracted to races.

But even if others of us don't consciously seek it, we've all adapted to the speed of life. Unfortunately this gives rise to various modern maladies.

It's a safe assertion that people have never been more impatient - a condition that breeds dissatisfaction. In the great rush, we can't bear being held up. We hate cooling our heels in queues and waiting rooms and often get inwardly agitated.

A most extreme form of impatience is road rage. And it's not necessary to get out of your car with a tyre lever to suffer from it. Most of us do.

We travel with mindless impatience to get where we're going and with an impoliteness we wouldn't dream of in other circumstances. We steadfastly refuse to let other drivers in when we have the right of way and, behind our closed windows, we curse the supposed failings of other motorists.

A second speed-related malady is boredom - a condition that hardly existed in earlier times. We've become so accustomed to continuous stimulation that we can't bear it when the stimulation stops.

If forced to wait for more than a minute or two, we simply must find something to read.

Doing nothing isn't a crime, it's an art - an art we've lost.

Even tiredness has become an embarrassing and undesirable condition. Some of you may have seen the huge billboards on the freeway going into to town that have a picture of a woman yawning widely with the words blazened across the image saying, "Tired is Ugly!" The ad is for some vitamin pills to boost you up.

I think it may have been this that was in the mind of Mr. Curly when he wrote the following letter to Vasco Pajama.

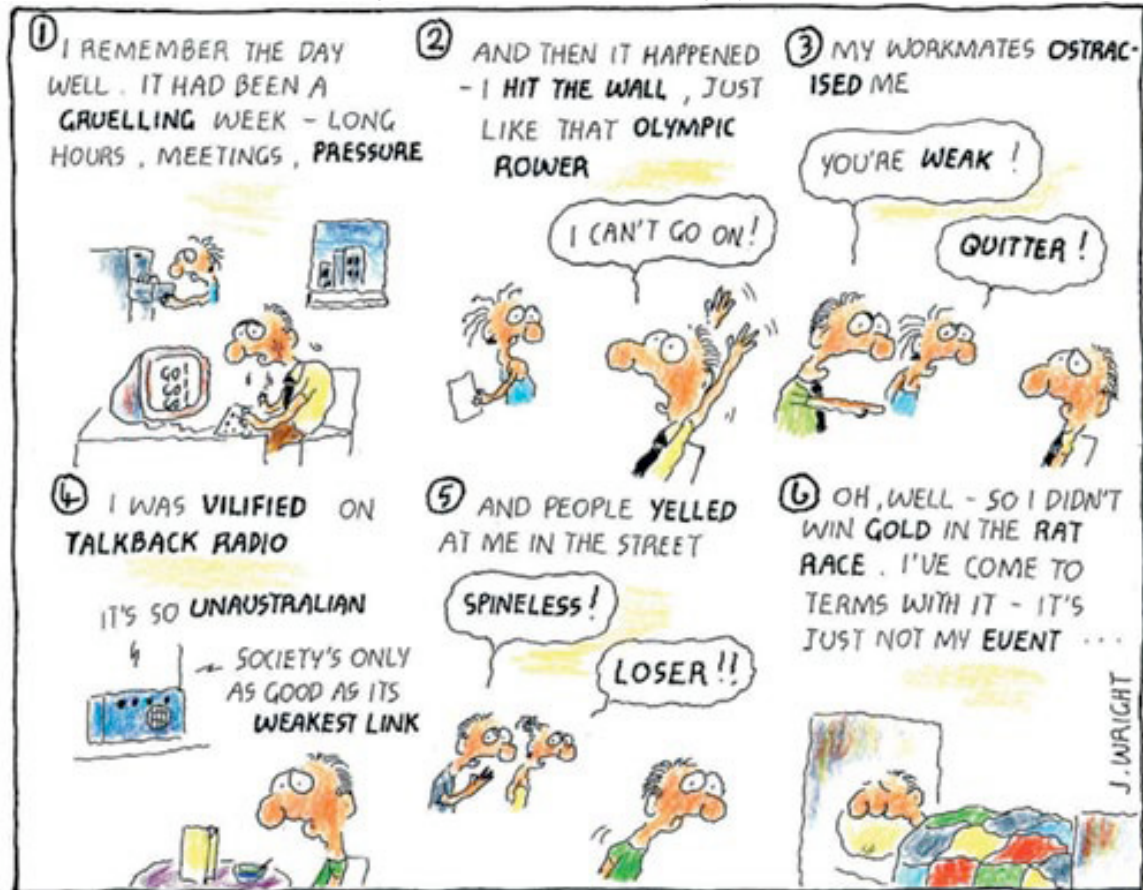
(letter about rest in "The Vasco-Pajama letters" by Leunig)

We're so rushed that we're losing the ability to look forward to things. We're also losing the ability to enjoy the moment.

In the haste of life, we often neglect what we know matters most to us: family and friends.

Why? Because, most of the time, they don't come with deadlines attached.

Sometimes I think we might feel like this little guy:



I think Zaccheus was someone who was deeply caught in the system too.

He was a tax collector – and probably had to steal to make a living and in the end became rich but deeply isolated and lonely.

Jesus gift to him was a simple invitation. “Zaccheus, come down– I want to spend some time with you.”

Jesus was pretty popular that day in Jericho – he was prophet of the month and all the important dignitaries were waiting to be greeted and noticed him. But contrary to everyone’s expectations Jesus goes straight to the most unpopular person in the town..

Australian Idol is supposed to be a show that goes about finding the most popular and talented pop singer in the country. Unfortunately it does this not by advancing the winners but by eliminating the losers.

I've got this idea that we should have a Australian Anti-Idol Competition. You start off with a huge group of young people who compete to see who is the best singer and most popular. They are then eliminated. And so on until you find the most unpopular, uninteresting, too ordinary, boring person in the country. Probably someone like you or me – then give them an award..

Well, Zaccheus was the winner of the Jericho Anti-Idol competition. Nobody and I mean nobody wanted to be his friend. Except – Jesus.

And what happened? Jesus went round to his joint and spent some time with him. Zaccheus for the first time in his life felt what it was like to be known and liked – to be given the time of day – to be given the gift of time and space to know and be known.

And the result – he is transformed. He becomes a more whole human being. His priorities are turned upside down and contrary to the system he starts putting others ahead of his own interests. He knows peace and friends for the first time.

And, the Good News is this. Jesus is still in the business of seeking out people who are lost in the system – who may even have lots of stuff – but have discovered the bitter emptiness of consumerism and the lie of more equals better.

In essence, this is what being church is all about. We may not be a perfect bunch of people here at Westgate but we are here together because we have individually and collectively heard Jesus' invitation to spend some time. To step down out of our trees, to step back from the system, to value life through God's eyes – to savor the gift of the Sabbath day and to invest a little in the relationships that make life worth living.

Rest is about restoration – sometimes the most restoring rest we can have is doing something other than our daily work that totally absorbs us. Sabbath keeping is about this. Faith is about knowing and being known by God...

Then as a Community we can become a gift of time and space, of love and new perspective to those around us who feel caught. And to those around us who are the least.

Jesus is still standing at the bottom of our tree saying “come down I want to spend time with you!”

And like Zaccheus, when we say yes, it will transform our lives forever.