

Westgate Baptist Community
Sunday 2 Oct 2005
A sermon by Geoff Wraight

Philippians 3:4b-14

Where is your Heart?

Keeping up with the Jones' (let's call them Hugh and Judith) (OHP)



Hugh Mackay:

"How are you going? All right?" used to be the standard Australian greeting, incorporating our charming tendency to answer our own questions. But we've now adopted a more sinister form of greeting that sounds like a symptom of a society in the throes of madness. (writes Hugh Mackay)

"How are you going? Busy?" is the new greeting and, to my shame, I actually used it recently when I ran into a friend at a concert. "Busy?" I asked, before I could stop myself. "Ah," he wisely replied, "just busy enough to justify telling people I'm still busy."

Busyness has become the new badge of honour. If you're not busy, you must be dead, or on the scrapheap. If you're not busy, you must have fallen victim to the demon drink or gone to the dogs. Not busy? Good grief, what a loser.

"How are you going? Busy?" is like a relentless spur we use to urge each other on, creating a personal version of the old Cold War promise of "mutually assured destruction": if we all stay busy - if we cling to each other in this desperate, dizzy dance - none of us will notice what's actually happening to us and we'll all be dead before we realise it."

Why is this cult of busyness so pervasive and widespread? What is it that is happening to us and our society that drives us to be driven so?

And Mackay has some wisdom to share on this subject. He suggests that we are suffering from an epidemic of anxiety that has been building for the last 25 years.

The gender revolution has transformed our patterns of marriage and divorce. The birthrate has plummeted and our households have shrunk. The combined impact of globalisation and the IT revolution has exerted increased pressure on our working lives and the restructuring of the economy has created a culture of job-insecurity.

We have begun to see ourselves as a different kind of society from the one we used to be - more media-driven, more drug-saturated, more commercialised, more competitive, less egalitarian, more closely engaged with Asia, more multicultural. Is it any wonder so many Australians now talk about their yearning for "balance", or describe their lives as being "out of control"?

...

The point is that the present climate was created by an epidemic of anxiety that predates, by many years, the rise of international terrorism. Our chronic anxiety has simply become more acute in response to 9/11 and the bombings in Bali, Madrid and London.

The terrorist threat (he goes on to say) actually gives some focus to our underlying sense of insecurity.

Whether our anxieties are vague or specific, our instinctive response is the same: we look for ways of regaining a sense of control over our lives and we seek the security of black-and-white certainty. The quest for "answers" leads some of us to embrace religious fundamentalism, some to put their faith in free-market economics, some to hope for a magic pill that will help them forget what the question was and others to just keep so busy that we never stop long enough to notice the pain of our insecurity..

Which brings us to Paul and his letter to the Philippians that we have been reflecting on over these past few Sundays. In the lovely paraphrase that you have there in the insert Paul is trying to impress on the Philippian church that pedigrees, qualifications, enthusiasm for doing the right thing, and even a passion for sheer hard work and achievements were not what really counted in the end.

.....If anyone starts bragging about their breeding and background to win an audience, I could trump them every time. I've got a pedigree to die for! I'm a pure blooded Israelite, born into the noble tribe of Benjamin. I was circumcised when I was eight days old, exactly as the law prescribes. I was educated by the Pharisees at the best school, so I know the scriptures inside out, and discipline and obedience are second nature to me. I was so pumped up with passion for the purity of religion that I led violent campaigns against declared heretics, including the church. You could measure me against the strictest interpretations of the law and I'd come out with a perfect record every time.

You could say that when it came to busyness and achievement – that Paul was a driven man. Yet he goes on to say that all this led him to emptiness in the end. The value of his perfect career to date amounted to nothing in light of a living encounter with Christ. Again in the words of the paraphrase:..

I'm no longer interested in how I measure up to any checklist of religious laws, however worthy it may be. God's checklist is the only one that matters to me now and it only has one

item on it. All those who trust Christ get the big tick from God. What I really want now is to know Christ intimately and to experience in my own life the power that raised him from the dead. I'll do whatever it takes — I'll take my share of his sufferings, I'll follow him on the road to death if need be — because the only thing that matters to me is to be united with him in his resurrection life.

There are two important things about this contrast that Paul paints with his previous life compared to now.

The first is that at the core of his life, the source of his new found passion is not a new fad or program, not even a spirituality course or retreat, but simply a relationship. An openness to the love of God expressed in the death and life of Christ...

The second thing is that this is a living relationship and ongoing and incomplete and for Paul to say, "My friends, I don't see myself as the expert in these things, but I know enough to be sure of which way to go" was an amazing transformation indeed. Here is the expert saying that he needed to be humble enough to realize that the inner journey with Christ was a learning and growing experience but one that gave him life and energy and a reason to hope..

Spirituality and faith is fundamentally about connectedness. And there is an enormous longing in our current high tech society for connectedness.

Unfortunately, this longing and desire is exploited by a consumer mentality that is constantly promising us new and greater connectivity through the latest mobile phone or connected device that brings us our email to the palm of our hand wherever we are...

Even so called quest for "spirituality" can fall victim to the consumer approach – something that is often found in the so-called new age movement or similar programs or retreats that promise to deliver a new found awareness..

But the truth is that an encounter with God is not the last stop in the spiritual shopping isle – it is in fact the relinquishment of shopping. It is allowing yourself to be found by actually ceasing to strive, and try..

Or as David Tacey puts it, "Spirituality is listening to your heart and then living in that place"

For Paul, the moment of truth came when the lie of his life was challenged by the living Christ himself. It was a painful moment – when he allowed himself to be open enough to his experience on the Damascus Road to realise that what he had spent so much of his energy striving against was leading him no-where. His pride and his sense of being in control must have been incredibly difficult to let go of – yet let go he did – and the rest is history..

Our longing for love, for connection, for relationship, for a centre of peacefulness, for our lives to be guided by love instead of hemmed in by fear are all ways of describing the thirst that can only be quenched when we allow ourselves to be found by God and taste the living water that is offered through Christ.

Practically, this is exactly what coming together in Sabbath rest and gathered worship around this table is all about. At the centre of our faith and our lives is a simple invitation to come and be found by God. To come and be open to the love and and living water offered.

But it is not cheap and will not leave you unchanged because it means, like Paul we actually have to let go of much that we think is important but in the end is not..

The ancient Latin poet Ovid may have got it right: "You who seek an end of love, love will yield to business: be busy and you will be safe." In other words, if you stay busy enough, you'll be protected from the demands of love.

The old-fashioned pastoral question, "How is your walk with the Lord?" is really the same challenge that comes to us today. We might re-phrase it to, "Where is your heart today" or "How much space are you giving to be found by God", or "Are you responding to that the still small voice calling you to stop, and be still and be found by God." or, "Where is your pain? and are you willing to hold it honesty and openness as you stand in the grace of God – and be free"

As we come to the Communion table now, we are going to listen to a new song that I came across during this week. I would love us to learn this and sing it together – but for now just listen to the words. It is called Come to the Water.

Listen too, for the invitation to come - the words are in the insert, there will be a verse that speaks to your heart - allow it to be your prayer..

(play Song)

Come to the Water

All who are thirsty for justice,
All who are thirsty for peace.
All who are thirsty for peace, for justice, come,
Come to the water of life.

All who are thirsty for mercy,
All who are thirsty for love.
All who are thirsty for love, for mercy, come,
Come to the water of life.

All who are thirsty for healing,
All who are thirsty for touch.
All who are thirsty for touch, for healing, come,
Come to the water of life.

All who are thirsty for beauty,
All who are thirsty for truth.
All who are thirsty for truth, for beauty, come,
Come to the water of life.

(interlude)

All who are thirsty for freedom,
All who are thirsty for hope.
All who are thirsty for hope, for freedom, come,
Come to the water of life.

All who are thirsty for laughter,
All who are thirsty for joy.
All who are thirsty for joy, for laughter, come,
Come to the water of life.

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