

No Condemnation

Romans 8:1-11

I've just experienced the blessing of some holidays, including a few days away from Melbourne in Tasmania, the place where Jodi and I went for our honeymoon some 22 years ago, and where the church in its wisdom sent me some 8 months later to serve as a pastor in Burnie-Devonport parish.

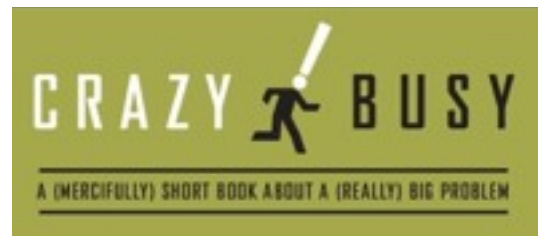
We've been back to Tasmania once before, but this was the first time for over a decade, and the first time by ourselves. There was a sense of nostalgia, even wistfulness in retracing our steps from all those years ago, reconnecting with some of the places that had formed such an important part of our lives for five years back in the 1990's.



The overarching impression that Tasmania left with this time was peace and space. The population of the state is just over one-tenth that of Melbourne alone. There's no traffic to speak of, and nowhere is far from stunning, soul replenishing natural beauty. It made me think about whether I was ready for a sea-change or tree-change.

Holidays have a habit of upsetting our equilibrium. They force us to slow down. It's what we desperately need to do, but paradoxically many of us find it difficult to step down from the constant pressure and stimulation of our work-a day lives. It took me until half way through my break to begin to wind down.

It so happened that the book I took with me on holidays was about the life I was leaving behind for a few days. It was called "Crazy Busy." I'm sure it was written just for me alone, but you may also find it remarkably personal and prophetic.



Our culture wears busyness as a badge of honour. Many of us would hate anyone to think that we are anything but busy. As the author remarks: "There are two realities of the modernised, urbanised, globalised world...our complexity and our opportunity...We have more opportunity than ever before. The result, then, is simple but true: because we can do so much, we do do so much. Our lives have no limits. And since our culture urges us to consume as much as we can in terms of what life can offer, in terms of things, experience and people, we feel duty bound to do so.

There are clear dangers in continuing along this path: Mental strain, physical exhaustion and emotional overload. But the greatest danger is spiritual. The clearest warning sign is that simply don't have any time to dip into the word of God. We let the stories spun by our culture shape our lives, rather than God himself. The world encourages us to invest ourselves even more fully in activity. It urges us to earn more so that we can do more. It marks us harshly when we fail to succeed. It seeks to suppress the questions and doubts that we have about whether this is the life we are meant to lead, or which we were created for. Through more and more, we think for ourselves less and less.

Jesus speaks of the situation that we face in the Parable of the Sower, and in particular where he speaks of the seed that has been sown among thorns. "The seed falling among the thorns refers to people who hear the word, but the worries of this life and the deceitfulness of wealth choke the word, making it unfruitful." I'm sure that each one of us could list a whole litany of things that we are worried about, and for many of us those things are tied up with the pace of the lives we lead: there's not enough time to cultivate relationships, to look after our health, to serve beyond our paid work. As the author of *Crazy Busy* writes, "for most of us, it isn't heresy or rank apostasy that will derail our profession of faith ...And if the worries of life don't swamp us, it's the upkeep from all the things that wealth enables to have that will."



We try to meet other people's expectations, and turn ourselves inside out in the process. We are under pressure to perform. We push ourselves to be seen as somebodies, or to prove our worth in the sight of others. We are more concerned about looking good rather than doing good. We live with the fear of the condemnation of others, or more sadly, self-condemnation for not getting it completely right.

The book *Crazy Busy* describes the process we all need to engage in: calm the crazy man or woman inside. And the only way to do that is to step back and size up the situation through God's eyes, to let the seed of the word, the message of the kingdom, fall on receptive soil. Only then can we become fruitful, which in biblical terms means lives that exhibit the harvest of good things that comes from an encounter with grace: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control, each one of them virtues that are in short supply in our society, and perhaps also in our own lives. And why? Because instead of drawing our strength and security from the God who has called us his children through the life of Jesus Christ, we take our life script from the world around us.



So let's listen now to the powerful word that the Apostle Paul speaks to us today: "Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus." These words contain the fullness of the message of the kingdom, which Jesus spoke in his parables, enacted in his healing ministry and fulfilled in his death on the cross.



What condemnation do you feel right now? Is it an accusing word from the mouth of another person, that you've failed them, or failed by not doing something right. Is it a decision made in the past that was wrong, and will not give you peace? Is it a fear of God himself, of having let God down again and again, and wondering if you will get what you deserve from him? After all, is God operates the way the world does, then we are all in real trouble.

But hear again: "there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus." Is that because we've done nothing worthy of God's judgement? Of course not. We have failed God and our fellow human beings. We have loved our selves more that God and our neighbour. We've believed the lies that we can do it all and have it all.



But the statement remains true, painfully but redemptively true: "There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus." Why? Because "God sent his own Son in the likeness of sinful humanity to be a sin offering ... he condemned sin in human flesh, so that the righteousness requirements of the law might be fully met in us." And through Jesus, no one can condemn us. No one can judge us. No societal ideal, no expectation that other's place on us, no self-imposed drivenness. We can't be separated from the love of God through Jesus Christ our Lord. I'm not sure about you, but I need to hear again and again this message of the kingdom, this good news of

God's love. I need to hear that "through Christ Jesus, the law of the Spirit who gives life has set me free." I need to know that God will fill me with the fullness of his love through the Holy Spirit, that my spiritual life is not what I can make of myself but what I receive from God continually, for the asking. I need to understand that God doesn't treat me the way the world does. He doesn't say to me: "When you've got your act together, you can come." Instead, while we were still sinners, his Son Jesus died for us. I need to know that I'm not at the mercy of my sinful nature. Jesus dwells in me through his Holy Spirit. In his strength I can master my incipient pride, pessimism, perfectionism, name your poison.

And we need to be reminded of this over and over and over again. Reading *Crazy Busy*, I was hoping for a quick and easy solution to living in an out of control world. There were some really good and practical suggestions, and you can ask me how I'm going with them. But there's really a one point plan. I knew it before I read the book: "Devote yourself to the Word of God and prayer."

Don't do this to get yourself into God's good books. You don't need to do that. You already belong to Christ. You have the Spirit's life in you. Do it because it's the way that you encounter the voice of God most clearly, and in hearing God you hear that you are his



beloved son, his beloved daughter. Secure in that identity, you can live calmly and meaningfully in a crazy world. The author writes: “Starting each day with eternity makes our ... problems and long to-do lists seem less significant. By sitting at the feet of Jesus [doing the one thing needful, being undistracted for a time] we will grow more like him — more patient, more loving, more thoughtful,” more fruitful. Amen.