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JUST AS I AM

Pastor Mark Doecke

One very early morning on ABC radio they were talking about what it's like to suddenly find yourself unemployed. It was the same week that Mitsubishi announced they were closing their car factory in Adelaide, and something like 1000 people were going to be retrenched. Rod Quinn, the host of the show on Fridays, was encouraging people who had experienced unemployment to ring in and talk about their experiences. As I listened to these people telling their stories I found myself reflecting on how much our work defines who we are and how we see ourselves.

Listen any Sunday morning to Macca on *Australia All Over*, and you'll hear him ask each of his callers or the people he meets on his road trips: "*And what do you do for a living?*"

Think about each time you meet a stranger: How often do you find yourself asking that person what work they do? I know I do it a lot, and many people ask me what my line of work is. We quickly form opinions of people based upon the kind of work they do.

But it's not only work that defines us. It's our relationships – who we are married to, who our parents are, our siblings, our children. With those relationships comes identity and obligation and responsibility.

Recently an Indigenous colleague of mine said to me, "The trouble with you whitefellas is that you have trouble just being." What an interesting and perceptive comment! "*You whitefellas have trouble just being.*" If our work and our relationships define us then it is little wonder we live on the edge of exhaustion so much of the time. If our identity centres around what we do then it is not surprising that in order to find meaning in life we carve out lives full of frantic activity. By always going, never stopping, we somehow feel more important, as if our lives are more significant. But how often do we stop and just 'be'?

Recently a friend of mine was on holidays for a couple of weeks and he rang me and told me how bored and restless he was. When I told him to enjoy being bored I think he wondered what planet I was from.

I recall reading a newspaper article in the Sydney Morning Herald at the beginning of the year which said something similar. The writer (I can't remember her name) was suggesting that if we really want to look after ourselves – our physical, emotional and spiritual wellbeing – then we need to learn how to stop and just be.

A couple of months ago I received a rather large glossy brochure inviting me to attend the 3rd annual conference called "Happiness and its Causes". I saw that the special guest was Nobel Peace Laureate and East Timorese President, Dr Jose Ramos-Horte. Then I looked at the list of other speakers. It didn't surprise me to see that amongst them was a Buddhist monk from Nepal, described by one author as the world's happiest man. Buddhist monks are often known for their ability to sit and contemplate and just 'be' for huge periods of time. Is their ability to just be one of the reasons why one of their members is regarded as an expert on teaching people to be happy?

I am not necessarily suggesting we ought to spend vast periods of time sitting in meditation. But I am suggesting we could do worse than finding regular times just to be, and to learn that we have value even when we are not being productive.

There are many potential problems with our obsession with doing and with productivity, with being defined by the work we do and the obligations and relationships we are in. For example, what happens when those things collapse? We are retrenched. Our partner leaves us. Our children reject us. Our work is no longer valued. We become sick or disabled. Where is our sense of identity then? What sort of crisis of meaning do we suffer from then?

As a Christian, one of the important certainties in my life is that there is a God who knows me and loves just because I am me. He is a personal God, vitally interested in my life. But he does not love me or give me more (or less) according to what I do or don't do. He values me just as I am. My worth, my value is not dependant upon my productivity. It doesn't rely on me at all. I am valued because I belong to God. He knows me. He made me part of his family when he opened my eyes to his love. That love was best demonstrated when he sent Jesus – His Son – into our world, to die on a cross, to bridge the gap between us and the great Creator God.

And this same God values every human life on this planet – no matter how sick, how poor, how disabled they are. He values the unemployed, the unemployable, the old, the very young and the unborn, just as much as he values the achievers and the rich and the gifted. All human life – every person - has intrinsic meaning because they have the breath of God in them.

You may not know this God. But He knows you. And He wants you to know Him. You can do that by opening up any Bible – any version – and by reading about Jesus His Son in the second half of that book. And because Jesus is God's Son, you know that everything you read about Jesus – his love, his compassion, and his acceptance of people – is also true of God, His Father. You are valued and your life has meaning just because you are you. It doesn't matter how the world or family see you. God sees you as special. And by learning more about Jesus you can find out more about the purpose and meaning of your life.

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