

A group of African porters once rushed through the jungle at a ridiculous pace set by the Europeans who had hired them. Eventually, they got to a clearing and sat down. The Europeans tried to get them moving again, but the head porter said, "No, we're not moving. We've come so far and so fast that we now have to wait for our souls to catch up with us."

I have recently been pondering on Mark 1: 29-39. We read that Jesus goes home with Simon, where Simon's mother-in-law is very ill, and Jesus heals her. It is a touching story of remarkable particularity in Jesus' ministry, and it reveals his care for and commitment to the individuals who had chosen to follow him.

When we read this story, there is no question that God is a personal God, available to each of us individually.

However, immediately after this story, we discover the whole community gathering at the door of the house - bringing their needs to Jesus. And, again, with this nameless crowd, Jesus is present, available, and compassionate.

Finally, after taking some time out to recharge, the disciples tell Jesus that people are looking for him, but he tells them that they must continue on to other villages in the region to minister to others.

It's like the Gospel writer wants to show us how Jesus' ministry moved so comfortably from the individual to the community. It is encouraging to see how Jesus moved so easily from serving a friend's mother-in-law to serving a whole town. Perhaps we cannot all do this. Some of us are, perhaps, more able to serve one-on-

one (that's me!), bringing God's grace to individuals one at a time. In this way, we represent one aspect of Christ's grace to others. Others may be more effective at serving groups but find one-on-one ministry difficult. In this way, we represent the other aspect of Christ's grace.

Both of these are valid and valuable ways to serve. When we can partner with each other so that both individuals and groups are well served, then we are able to more fully embody Christ's message and grace. This is one of the reasons why the Church remains an important organisation.

However we may serve, though, it's important to take note of the fact that even Jesus needed to take time out by himself to pray, to rest, and to recharge his energies. When we fail to manage our health like this, our ministry will inevitably begin to lose its effectiveness. We do well, though, when we follow Christ's example and make time for the things that restore us. Then, when we have recharged, we can return to service with enthusiasm and strength.

As I write this, I have now led worship at 27 of the 52 churches in the circuit since September. I am so aware of the many challenges we face as individual churches and as a circuit. Many of you have told me how tired you are - how you want to continue to serve Christ out of a deep conviction of faith but that physically, you just cannot do what you used to do.

When I arrived here in September I fully intended to "hit the ground kneeling" and listening. Well, I can tell you that I've hit the ground (not just running, but) sprinting. And my body is

beginning to tell me that that is not good.

Remember the image of our porters at the beginning of this letter? The pace of daily life and church life is accelerating, and the demands are unrelenting. It's as if we got on the slow train that stops at every little village, but instead of chugging its way gently through the countryside, it gets faster and faster, accelerating steadily and relentlessly, streaming through every station, until the carriage is swaying alarmingly and we are hanging on to our seats and to our luggage – and the speed still increases! When is it going to come off the tracks?

In a culture where speed and the ability to "pack in more" are becoming self-defeating, many people cry out for space and long to slow down.

We need to build some slowing-down time into our lives. Then we can listen to the quiet whispers of God. We need to create times for stopping and resting.

Slowing down is a vital part of the spiritual journey. Then we can stop panicking about when we will come off the rails and start noticing the fascinating countryside we travel through.

We have many important decisions to make about the future (not just for the sake of our generation, but for the sake of the future) and more importantly, for the sake of the gospel and the Reign of God. I was deeply touched by the latest pastoral letter of the Secretary of Conference, wherein he says, "We cannot go on as we have been: we cannot continue to do all that we have done, and when new

work is necessary, we will have to end something else to enable it." But to do that, we need to carve out the time to slow down and listen (both individually and collectively) to what God is saying to us about the present and the future.

The circuit is providing time for us to do that on a Wednesday night. We gather at 8 pm on Zoom to pray for the Church and the world – some slowing down time, with others, to hear God. Join us if you can.

How best do you serve God and others - in groups, or one-on-one? How can you do more of this today? How can you value and respect the way others serve God? And as you serve, how can you make time to rest, pray and recharge?

Grace

*Romeo.*