

SERMON AT GELORUP: SUNDAY BETWEEN 3 AND 9 JULY 0S14a:
6/7/2014: GEOFF CHADWICK: Matthew 11.15-30
THE NEMESIS OF GOLDBLOCKS

Jesus said:

*¹⁶ 'But to what will I compare this generation? It is like children sitting in the market-places and calling to one another;
¹⁷ "We played the flute for you, and you did not dance; we wailed, and you did not mourn."*

I wonder if you've ever felt like that? You've tried all manner of things to keep someone happy and none of them work!

"There's just no pleasing some people."

You might say to yourself.

I know I've had my share of this in Parish work. I will speak of other places.

Where introducing some modern music is met with complaints for a return to the traditional. Where the same traditional music is deemed to be old fashioned.

Where I was told to lighten up because my preaching was too serious only to be told to get more serious because I was being too lighthearted. Where I was told to spend more time visiting - whilst at the same time having my hours cut due to lack of finances. Where criticisms of not entertaining came from those who cared not to attend the monthly BBQs Gabby and I hosted at the Rectory.

Yes! I can relate to Jesus comparing his generation to the petulant children in the market-place. John the Baptist came to proclaim the kingdom of God, but he was considered far too austere to be listened to. Jesus, on the other hand, came to proclaim the message of God's kingdom but was considered far too liberal. The people, it seems, would not listen no matter how the message was packaged.

Have you met people like that? No matter what you do nothing seems to be right for them. Make them a cup of tea and it's too hot. Give them a bowl of soup and it's too cold. Suggest a walk on a nice day and it's too cold. Suggest a swim on a warm day and it's too hot. Such people are the nemesis of Goldilocks nothing is ever *just right*.

Of course, if we are honest, we all can be the nemesis of Goldilocks. We all that know we can be a pain sometimes. We love to complain.

Some years ago a bishop said to me that:

"We live in a culture of complaint."

He suggested that no matter what you do someone will complain about it. I'm sure he was speaking about his role as Bishop.

I once suggested the idea to a school bursar who used to hear complains all day long. She suggested Her response was interesting. She said that a culture of complaint is the price we pay for living in a democratic society. She suggested and that it is helpful to see complaints, a not as complaints, but as people exercising their right to free speech.

I see some wisdom here because this takes the personal sting out of the complaint- in theory, at least.

But back to our reading.

Jesus points out that God's message is not always welcome. Both John the Baptist and Jesus suffer rejection. This means that we, too, who take God seriously will suffer some rejection. It may not be be-heading or crucifixion, but may be polite indifference. The message is not welcome as we search Goldilocks to find the words that are "*Just right*."

I was curious why the message of God's goodness is not always welcome, and then I found a helpful little article by Paul Tyson entitled *Mars and Venus*

in the Shopping Centre (Zadok Perspectives, Winter #123, 2014, p4). He draws a parallel between St Paul's experience of the Athenian marketplace and that of the modern shopping centre. He suggests that nothing has really changed. Venus, the god of feminine beauty, and Mars, the god of masculinity are still worshiped on billboards and glitzy shop windows. We children, in our market place, are "relentlessly presented" with the images of "ever young" and "ever powerful" as "our objects of devotion". He then points out that

"that frame will never, can never, satisfy the deepest and highest spiritual longings that animate the very process of self worship."

Venus and Mars still call to us.

Tyson then goes on to say something that I think is very helpful:

... embracing imperfection, old age, losers and vulnerability is a potent practice of counter worship. Seeing interior and transcendent beauty, valuing the counter practices of power — service, generosity, vulnerability - humbly loving others and self as secondary to the love of God; these should define the people of God. Should we in the church accept the narratives of victory, desirability, and self-aggrandisement...? Such religion may well "succeed", but such success is won by fitting the gospel to the self-worshipping frame of our larger culture. That, quite simply is to deny Christ.

The "flute" we play in our market place produces an unusual tune. The tune is so unusual that it is not always welcome. But to those with willing ears, the tune will find a way. This tune of imperfection, service, generosity and vulnerability is the real tune of life -and the tune is "just right."

The Lord be with you.

And also with you.