

Friday, 31 January 2014

Homily at Western Province Preparatory School's Centenary Celebration

A homily preached at the Western Province Preparatory School's Centenary Celebration dedication service at St John's Parish, Wynberg on January 31:

Psalm

51:1-9;

Mark

4:26-34.

I greet you all in the name of God, who created you, sustains you and redeems you. Amen.

What a joy it is to be here today to join you in giving thanks to God for your centenary celebrations. Congratulations to the School, and to all the dedicated visionaries who have not only kept this school going but grown it. Let us pause and say, "Thank you, God, for your faithfulness in nurturing and growing this seed over these hundred years."

Reading your history, I can only say that it must be through the grace of God working through you, God's people, that you have germinated and blossomed to reach this milestone. You can go forward confidently into the future, knowing that God will carry you further. The story of WPPS is a story of faith; a response to what an individual felt placed in his heart, by God and in faith, and on which he acted. It is a "reckless" belief that once touched by God you are transformed eternally. Faith without works is dead and, I might add, work with no faith is "going nowhere slowly." So we are grateful for your predecessors and benefactors, who had faith and acted, and we celebrate this story of faith today. As in the Bible lesson, Mark 4, it is through one sower who plants seeds filled with the Spirit, urging God's community to act for God's sake and with God's people, that we can achieve God's result, fruitfulness.

God still calls each one of you today as you celebrate this centenary – boys, parents, old boys and teachers, all present here – to continue to have such faith. So I ask each one of you today what is the one thing – the tiny seed – that God is saying or putting in your heart and mind today as you celebrate 100 years of God's faithfulness to you? What action will you take on it? How will you respond in worship today and in witness and service to God's people, in the here and now for this revelation?



As Bishop of Grahamstown, I used to be on the councils of St Andrew's School and of the Diocesan School for Girls. One of those who served with us was Mr Brockman, who represented WPPS. In retrospect I enjoyed his impatience. When it came to anything he perceived as standing in the way of education and of sharing the educational resources of wealthy, resourced schools with less resourced ones, you noticed his reaction instantly. At that time, St Andrew's wanted to buy Good Shepherd School – as they had when they took over WPPS – and to plant a seed of excellence at

Good Shepherd. But red tape was in the way now, which was sad. And perhaps Mr Brockman was trying to articulate the question: “What mustard seed is God calling you to scatter, no matter how small? It will germinate, for it is from God and God will teach you to nurture it.”

I am a relatively anxious person, and am glad there was no Ritalin in my day, when teachers and parents had other ways to deal with anxiety and distraction. It shows especially when I am watching sport. This past week, watching Rafael Nadal, my favourite player, lose the Australian Open Championship, I could not hide this anxiety. At the gym, I kept on correcting his double faults, his serve and his backhand until I nearly fell off the treadmill. My daughter, who was listening to her loud music through earphones, said: “Dad, you are talking loudly and disturbing others.” Such was my anxiety over wanting Nadal to win.

I have the same level of anxious energy and urgency when it comes to education. I connected deeply with, and appreciated especially, your school's diversity statement. At its core, it asks the question: “How can WPPS help all South African children have access to first-class, well-rounded, valued-based education, regardless of their race, class and gender?” In biblical language, how can you demonstrate that in Christ there neither Jew nor Greek, Gentile nor slave, especially in the provision of education?

In socio-economic terms, the issue is how do we bridge the inequality gap? Your diversity statement is powerful and searching indeed. It says, “Seek to be principled and pragmatic.” The meaning of being principled as the followers of Jesus Christ is very clear: it means a commitment to sharing, loving and care for the poor and your neighbour. To be pragmatic, I want to suggest two or three challenges to you.

The Anglican Church of Southern Africa, of which you are part, has adopted as its Vision that we should be:

*Anchored in the love of Christ,
Committed to God's Mission, and
Transformed by the Holy Spirit.*

Amongst our priorities is education. We have reconfigured the Anglican Board for Education in Southern Africa (ABESA) like you did 100 years ago and we are planting Anglican schools, through two organisations, Vuleka Schools and the Archbishop's Education Initiative.

Firstly, I hope you will support such institutions and initiatives. I am doing so through a trust called Archbishop Thabo Cecil Makgoba Development Trust (ATCMDT), which provides bursaries and scholarships to disadvantaged children. For example, St Mary's School in Waverley, Johannesburg, has partnered with the trust to support disadvantaged learners in Alexandra Township.

In the Old Testament, the Lord says to Habakkuk, “Write down a vision; inscribe it clearly on tablets, so that it may be read at a glance” (Habakkuk 2:2). I have a dream, a vision for WPPS at this centenary celebration which I want to scatter before you. You know that dreams, visions and ideas don't fulfil themselves. They need committed people. They don't teach themselves, they need to be taught and learned by people. So here is my dream, and hopefully you will help me make it practical.

It is two-fold:

1. My dream is for the establishment of Centenary Scholarships for black disadvantaged, talented and academically able learners. I ask you to pledge a small account for this dream to put legs on your diversity statement. So I invite you all this Lent to take on the task of saving R10 a day for 40 days, or R400 per boy, per parent, per old boy, and for the next 40 years, to continue to give this Lenten gift to support these Centenary Scholarships for diversity at WPPS. God will multiply or

diversify this seed capital enormously. My pledge, to remind you of this, will be a small seed annually of R400 for the next 10 years paid upfront at prizegiving this year to a boy who shows and reflects both an honour and character that promote all forms of diversity at WPPS.

2. The other side of the vision, one informed by scripture, is to ask you, in collaboration with your brother schools, St Andrew's, St George's, and Bishops (Diocesan College), to look at the waiting lists of our Anglican schools, and to ask yourselves: Is it not time to think in the long term of the possibilities of a WPSS (that is a Senior School) as part of our initiative to establish new schools? Vuleka, in partnership with ABESA and assisted by ATCMDT, is acquiring property in Gauteng to build the first school envisaged in this initiative: a boys' boarding school, a low fee-paying, value-based excellent school. Is a partnership with this initiative feasible, possible or desirable?

Congratulations on your first 100 years! Thank you, Lord for WPPS, its founders, owners, benefactors, parents, boys, teachers and old boys. Through this service and celebration, we rededicate it to you today. May it continue its witness in education as it informs, forms and transforms all into your likeness. Amen.

+Thabo Cape Town

Posted by [Thabo Makgoba](#) at 20:00 