

Thirteenth Sunday after Pentecost, 30<sup>th</sup> August, 2009  
with Christ Church Grammar School

*James 1:17-27 Mark 7: 1-8, 14-15*

Change of heart

Year 5 recently worked on a project in which small groups chose one of the tablets or memorials here in the church to research. Behind each memorial is a special story about the life of an individual or of a family associated with Christ Church. Some were distinguished people such as Sir Henry Chauvell, the famous soldier and Annette Bear- Crawford, a leading figure of the women's movement in nineteenth century Australia, and some were quite ordinary folk. Many were pioneers of this city and all of them, in some way, helped build and beautify this House of Worship which has influenced the lives of so many people, including thousands of boys and girls from Christ Church Grammar School.

Last Tuesday, Mother Jenny and I had the pleasure of seeing the Year 5 presentations. We were impressed that so many who worked on these projects obviously became genuinely interested in their research and learned an immense amount from it about places, events and people. And by learning, I don't mean that they just filled their heads with lots of historical information, but that they actually had thought about these people and their lives and came to a realisation of the tremendous effort and generosity that has gone into building this community of church.

And isn't that what education is all about? Not about learning for the sake of it, turning a person into a walking encyclopaedia with a head full of facts and figures, but a *thinking* person, someone who is changed by what he or she learns, who - as a result of learning - understands the world and people better and deeper all the time. Education is about growing in understanding, you might say. Growing in appreciation of how things work, how people behave, what makes the world go round and, in the case of the Year 5 project, what makes community. The great thing about going to school, is that we can keep on growing in understanding, broadening our minds, widening our horizons, instead of being unaware of the world around us, like a horse with blinkers who can only see directly in front of him and doesn't see anything else.

Jesus is a great one for telling us how we can always grow and keep on changing to become more and more our real selves as God created us to be. And we believe that Jesus not only shows us the way but helps

us to keep on growing. When the school gathers for assembly here in church twice a week, we say together that wonderful school prayer "Teach us good Lord." Then we actually listen to his teaching in the Bible reading for the day. And if we listen carefully to what he is saying - I'm sure you'll agree with me - that we often do see things differently, sometimes change our position and decide, yes, that sounds right and I'll try to do that myself. By taking the teaching of Jesus to heart, and resolving to follow him, what changes is our whole way of seeing things and acting. Jesus says, open yourselves up to me, listen, think about what I am saying, and indeed I will work in you to help you grow and become even better at understanding yourself and others, a more kind and forgiving person than you are already. Stay focused on me, let me into your hearts and - in the words of our opening hymn - I will "enlarge and expand your living souls." The Christian promise is that by befriending Jesus and learning from him, putting our trust in God's Spirit to work in us, we can become even more caring and loving.

Of course just as learning at school requires effort, staying focused on Jesus also requires effort. We need to be reminded of his teaching by hearing it often, and reminded too of God's power and presence to help us, because we so easily forget. St James speaks in today's reading about people who look at themselves in a mirror and then on going away immediately forget what they were like! All Christians in every stage of life need to stay focused on Jesus; to hear the stories again and again, so that as St James says, his word becomes 'implanted' and grows in us; to talk to God in prayer; and to receive the bread of life for our journey. In these ways, we keep in touch with God so that - just as a caterpillar ever so slowly changes into a butterfly - we might be grow more and more into the free and loving person God wants us to be.

We may not see any change in ourselves, but we don't have to worry about results. Compared to learning at school, in following Jesus and learning from him, there are no tests, no grades, no conditions attached to our friendship with him. Again and again he tells us that God loves us for who we are and not for how well we perform or what we achieve or don't achieve, or how good we are or even that sometimes we behave in a less than beautiful way. God just wants us open our hearts to him, to let him pour his love into our hearts, so as to transform us from the inside and help us to keep on growing in faith and love.

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