



St Peter's College

ADELAIDE, AUSTRALIA

Archbishop Geoff Smith's sermon for the Commissioning of Tim Browning

Today is a very important and quite rare event. We are commissioning Mr Browning as the 15th headmaster of St Peters College. To have had only 15 headmasters in 170 years means the commissioning of a new headmaster doesn't happen very often and we certainly hope it doesn't happen again for quite some time.

With the beginning of the term of a new head its natural to ask questions about the new headmaster- what is he like? How will he treat me? What will he change?

Its also natural to think about the school and our hopes and dreams for it. There are lots of stakeholders, you know people who have an interest in Saints. Parents and staff, students, the church, former students all have an interest and I think it's fair to say everyone wants the school to go really well because if it does everyone will benefit.

The primary focus of the school is on the students and the experience of learning and development they have here.

We want the students of St Peters to be great, for their own well-being and also because of the opportunity to influence the wider community that graduating students from this school have.

The question is what does it mean to be great?

When we think of people who are seen as great in our community, people who are famous for doing good things, people who have power and influence, people who we might want to be like I guess we think of sports people-maybe like Scotty James at the winter Olympics, maybe musicians or artists, maybe people with lots of money. All these people have influence, and therefore power. And that's probably the standard kind of understanding. That's what greatness is about. Those are the kind of people who have profile and who others want to copy and be like.

Jesus gave a different definition of greatness to his disciples and we heard about that in the second reading today. Jesus said if you want to be great you must serve others.

That means to focus on the good of other people, put yourself out for other people and their benefit, give yourself and your energy for others.

Jesus is a clear example of someone whose whole focus was on other people. He gave himself tirelessly to help other people, even when he was worn out.

The accounts in the new testament talk about great crowds of people coming to be healed and helped by Jesus and he did help them and he did heal them.

This didn't happen just once but many, many times. A real focus for Jesus was people in need. He didn't turn people away, he didn't reject people, he always had time for anyone who was in any kind of need. He was focussed in serving others. He was focussed on helping people's lives be better and more whole and more full of life.

Jesus ultimate service was his dying on the cross where he gave himself so that we could be reconciled to God. His was the ultimate greatness because it cost him shame, humiliation, suffering and in fact his life. Jesus approach is summed up in the last sentence of the second Bible reading for today when he says he came not to be served but to serve and to give his life a ransom for many. Jesus not only taught about greatness in theory-he lived it by giving his life.

There are lots of measures of greatness. Fame, wealth, power, and influence. None of these are wrong but Jesus definition and example of greatness is important for at least two reasons.

First, serving others, caring for others, working for the good of other people has a lasting positive effect on the life of other people. People remember being cared for and helped and encouraged. Those actions build people up in a positive way and in a way that lasts. Those actions build positively into people's lives.

Many of the common measures of greatness we use don't last. You might be famous today but forgotten next week. You might be rich today, but a market crash means it all disappears. You can be a high flyer but that just means there is a long way to fall. Serving people creates something positive in the lives of others which does not disappear.

The second reason why serving others is so significant is that we all can do it. There are not many famous people really. Not really many very rich or very influential people so if we make that the measure of greatness and if we want to be great in that way, most of us are going to be disappointed- we are just not going to make it. But being great by serving others is open to everyone. It doesn't require special gifts or talents, just a determination to follow Jesus way and make a positive lasting difference in people's lives.

As we commission Mr Browning today we are conscious that there are many facets to his role. Many things he will have to get right in order to be a great headmaster. Sorry about that.

There are enrolments to keep up, academic standards to keep improving, sporting performance to work on, music and the arts to develop, the Christian witness of the school to keep deepening and so on and on. There are many expectations because we want this school to be great.

But in the midst of all this actually for an Anglican school like St Peters the way of Jesus lies at its heart. Following Jesus, pointing people towards Jesus, being like Jesus.

There are many measures of greatness in our community but above them all our measure needs to be the measure of Jesus. Serving others, building others up, caring for other people. And as the leader of the school Mr Browning as a follower of Jesus himself will be seeking to serve, to work for the benefit of others and not himself.

We want this school to be great. We want all the students and staff at this school to be great. We want this school to have a great impact not just in South Australia but nationally and internationally. And to be truly great in the midst of everything else there must be that Jesus pulse.

The beating heart of the school must be Jesus and his way of caring for others. That will make this school great and will lead to the school itself and those who are part of the school community to be an incredibly positive force in Adelaide and beyond.

Mr Browning, we are glad you are here. We are glad you are a follower of Jesus and we ask you to lead this school in his way. Focussing on serving the good of other people. In that way this school community will be truly great and that's what we really want to be.

We are conscious that yours is a big task but you wont be doing it by yourself. Many are ready to support you and we know as you focus on serving others and helping others to do the same Jesus will also be giving you the strength and help you need. He did promise to be with us and he is always faithful to his promise.

Be assured of our prayers. Not just today but through the years of your time here at the College. Yours is a weighty task but an incredibly important one. Please help us to serve as Jesus served. Amen.

Archbishop Geoff Smith