

***THE LEADERSHIP OF JESUS – THE ROAD LESS TRAVELLED***

Keynote address: The Right Reverend George Browning

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Survival, indeed pleasure, on a journey requires access to waterholes. And on life's journey we dread the possibility of exclusion from them. The poor can be excluded and experience even further deprivation of nourishment. The alienated are excluded with a consequent lack of warmth and fellowship. Through lack of education, the ignorant are excluded. Youth are often excluded and denied the belonging and inspiration they seek. Sometimes the elderly are excluded and lack the love and recognition they need for dignity.

Exclusion is a double curse. Not only does it deny us the water upon which our very life depends. It also deprives us of the fellowship and conversation of fellow travellers who rest under the shade of the tree, as they wait their turn at the well. On the one hand, exclusion can occur because powerful, rich, ambitious, greedy and manipulative people seek to control the sources of human nourishment for their sole benefit or perhaps for the benefit of other people who become beholden to them. On the other hand, exclusion can occur as a result of inadequate education; some do not know where the wells are. On any journey, effective leadership will be alive to these facts. Some principles are immediately apparent:

*Leaders should not only guide people to the wells, they must also unmask unjust exploitation of them. Leaders should also encourage and stimulate conversations beside the waterhole, ensuring that none are excluded from fellowship with each other or from the water itself.*

I have drawn the well metaphor from the account in Chapter 4 of *John's Gospel*: a meeting at Jacob's well. *She* was a Samaritan woman; *he* was a Jew; they found themselves at the well in the middle of the day. For some reason both were excluded from normal fellowship, no-one would voluntarily draw water at that time. She was presumably excluded because of her somewhat ambivalent set of relationships; he, because he was a traveller and did not belong to those parts. Despite their diverse backgrounds, being at the well together entailed that conversation came almost as a matter of course. Before it took place however, a little play was worked out between the two. Jesus asked the woman to draw the water for him. I have now been in two places, [the slums of Manila, and the Danikel desert in Ethiopia], which are evocative of this action. Jesus initiated the conversation, but allowed the woman room to find her own response. The initiation of such conversations is a key matter on '*the road less travelled*', and a true mark of a leader. Jesus was an adept conversationalist. And their interaction initially climaxed over the identification and location of the water. Jesus said,

*If you knew ... who it is that is saying to you, 'Give me a drink', you would have asked him, and he would have given you living water.*

However the conversation then proceeded to another significant issue, namely about where people are to worship, 'on this mountain' - Gerrizim [where a very small Samaritan community still exists today], or on the other mountain - Jerusalem. Jesus responded by arguing that it frankly does not matter, you can worship on this mountain, or the other one, but in reality you do not have to worship on either, for '*God is Spirit and those who worship must worship in Spirit and in truth*'. A mark of a true leader is the ability to break free of the shackles that define or confine the present, opening up new possibilities, which may reach far beyond the parameters assumed by the question.

One of the most puzzling questions facing the Church today is why we have so few leaders who are able to do this. Many Church leaders take for granted the Gerrizim/Jerusalem question and frame their answers within it. Our structures are almost always accepted as given. Permission is seldom given to question Church hierarchies or the boundaries that protect them. The same problem faces our political leaders, especially those who are driven by the polls - and that would have to be most! Reconciliation with Australia's Indigenous people will not happen by working within given frameworks of white justice systems. The very act of apology takes us outside that framework and opens up a range of new options, which cannot be predicted in advance. Apology was the way of Desmond Tutu, [*apology is offered by the strong, not the*



*weak*”, he said], it is the way of Jesus. That is why *‘the road less travelled’* – following Jesus, is so exciting. That road takes us beyond prescribed boundaries, into territories as yet unexplored and into a quality of experience beyond the imagining of most. It is this new territory which will equip us for the emerging communities of the new century.

Let me return to the metaphor and the three general areas of exploration I have identified.

## 1. Leaders identify wells

Where are the wells? This is a difficult question in modern times. We can point to where they were; it is much harder to say where they are now, or where they are emerging. The wells used to be found within clearly defined sets of hierarchies. They used to be discovered in areas of study which were clearly differentiated from each other. We have looked for them through life-time loyalties in choice of profession, business associations and Church denominations. Wells were promoted by generously rewarding those who have succeeded in competition with others. [Regrettably the latter is still the case].

Four years ago I gave a valedictory address at Canberra Grammar School, which seems to be well remembered, often it has been quoted back to me. It was based on the following words from *Isaiah 42:3*, words which were deemed to have been fulfilled in Jesus [*Matthew 12:20*], *‘A bruised reed he will not crush, and a dimly burning wick he will not put out’*. In that address I suggested that most of the boys would do well: they would probably run their own businesses, be appointed CEOs of large companies, become lawyers, doctors or highly efficient IT experts; while others could become politicians or public servants. However, one in two would probably never sustain a satisfying life-long partnership; one in four would probably be seriously abusive of wife or partner. One in five would be unacceptably abusive of his own children. Where are the wells that nourish and sustain the whole person? In most of our schools the wells that nourish competition, leading to worldly success, are well in place. Are the wells that nourish ethical decision-making, responsibility in relationships and respect for the dignity of others as clear? What is the justification in having an Anglican school, unless it clearly establishes and sets forward our Mission? Are our staff and pupils clear about that Mission? Do we try hard enough to articulate it?

I have no doubt that we must develop a more integrated approach to our method of education so that the wells from which the children drink are no longer segregated exclusively as, say, Science, or English, Core and Non-core. I like the five-step approach of Peter Vardy. How many of you are seriously introducing it or something like it, into your school curriculum? What about Ethics, where does this discipline fit in your curriculum? Why doesn’t Geography, for example, have a strong ethical stream woven through it? A study of ethical issues relating to the environment, population explosion, and the movement of migrants and refugees would seem to be integral to an appropriate study of this subject.

And what of silence? Where does it fit into your routine? In the classroom, in the dressing room before a game, in the Assembly, as well as on the annual Retreat, or in the Chapel, silence can and should be an integral part of the experience of every student. Why do we need silence? Well, in the beginning there was silence, at the end there will be silence and in between we are all dependent on the well-established rhythms of life. Work and rest, word and reflection, action and pause, day and night. John of the Cross said: *‘God has only spoken one Word, his word is Jesus, he speaks that word forever in the silence’*. If there is no silence, then there will be no space into which voices can speak, nor an opportunity for awe to break in upon the human experience. The rhythms of which I speak are in the Scripture called *‘Sabbath’* the crown of creation, the fulfillment of life. Schools should be places where these rhythms become ingrained. Schools should be places where Sabbath is experienced rather than taught.



In today's world much is made of spirituality, while less is made of religion. I believe the reason for this is that people perceive spirituality to be inclusive and holistic, while religion is wrongly perceived to be exclusive and judgmental. We only have ourselves to blame, as this perception has developed into a reality for many Australians. Sadly, the hierarchical guardians of religion seem to spend so much energy defending our boundaries in an ever more pluralistic society. In school we contribute to this perception by separating out our teaching method, so that 'religion' becomes another discipline one can accept or reject along with medieval history or music.

In truth, I understand spirituality to be the '*energy generated by a lived life*', while I understand true religion to be the '*owned story of a community of faith*'. Thus I see spirituality as a dimension of all human life, whether people believe in God or not. Spirituality is shaped by our experience of life: birth and death, pain and joy, poverty and wealth, migration and alienation, education and ignorance. Spirituality can be metaphysical or earthy, philosophically expressed or experientially defined, connected or disconnected, shared or private.

Religion, on the other hand, is the owned story against which we gain a sense of value and identity from our past; meaning and direction for our present; a sense of destiny and hope for our future. It seems to me that if spirituality is to be enduring, it must find itself expressed within true religion, or invent one of its own. It should come as no surprise that there are '*New Age*' Religions. Ironically then, it is religion in its truest sense which is inclusive, and spirituality that ultimately will implode unless given shape and meaning through religion.

What do I mean? We human beings are incurably a species of storytellers. The Christian religion is the collectively-owned story that gives meaning and value to life's experience through its particular interpretation of sacrifice and service, grace and forgiveness. This interpretation, the Christian faith, is centered in the life and work of the Jesus who said:

*... those who drink of the water that I will give them will never be thirsty.*

It is extremely important therefore that this religion is integrated into the whole fabric of the school program and not left floundering as a compulsory academic unit two hours a fortnight. [The Catholic Schools have been far better at this integration than we have.] The wells from which our students [and staff] drink then, must unambiguously contain the living water that Jesus offers and by which we are sustained.

## **2. Leaders promote and stimulate the conversation**

In recent times there has been considerable debate about whether the Church should receive Government money to run employment agencies. This debate gained sharp focus over the question of whether the Church had the right to ask that those it employed in the agency be members of its own religious group. It seemed to me that the debate was most important, but that the focus was on the wrong question. We should first ask why the Government had decided to privatise what seemed clearly to be its own social responsibility. Why was the Government giving the money to the 'not for profit' sector, especially the Church, to do what it could reasonably be expected to do itself. The answer can only be:

- a] the Church [or 'not for profit' sector] can do the job more cheaply and therefore save the Government money; and/or
- b] the Church can deliver the desired outcomes more effectively.

If this were not true then there would be no point in the Government journeying down this track. If it is true, then the Church has every right, indeed duty, to employ people with the same ethos, sacrificial outlook, and generosity of spirit, so that the outcomes can be guaranteed. The critical issue being that the Church had the right to employ people who could and would engage in the same



conversation; it did not have the right to demand that these people come from within its own particular denominational base. These people may be found within one's own denomination or in other denominations.

Within the school, I would claim the same holds fundamentally true. We do not have the right to demand that all the teachers/leaders in each of our schools are Anglican. It would in any case be impossible to deliver. However, we do have the right, indeed the duty, to ensure that all who serve in leadership positions have the desire and commitment to stimulate and lead the conversation around the well of living water. The School's leadership must be committed to the School's mission.

As I write this paper, the Sydney Mardi Gras has just taken place. It is presented as a parade of fun and joyous celebration. For this reason the Roman Catholic and Anglican Archbishops have been strongly and unfairly parodied as a consequence of their opposition to it. I support their opposition in principle. But the parade has far more layers to it than simply a parade of decadence and promiscuity. It is a parade that mocks oppressive and inappropriate hierarchies. It is a parade that supports various civil rights causes, including Indigenous rights. Nevertheless, it is characterised by promiscuity, a morality that Christians cannot accept. Regrettably however, the Church's criticism [perhaps inevitably] is heard as opposition to all levels of the parade.

Consequently, and in the minds of youth at least, many have become excluded from contemporary conversation rather than stimulating it. This is because we have somewhat irrelevantly insisted on the terms of the conversation. You will recall that Jesus was roundly criticised by the religious leaders of his time for engaging in conversations they deemed thoroughly inappropriate. His simple answer was that he came to minister to the sick, not to the well.

Most of you will know that late last year I went through a fairly difficult patch. As I was travelling through it, I learned many things, not least from those who engaged in conversation with me. Almost without exception those who engaged in conversation, did so to find a connecting point, to be encouraging, to nurture and sustain, to be a source of life. Those who did this included a number of well-known people in leadership positions. However, the vast majority were ordinary people; children, Aboriginal people, abused and marginalised people who somehow seemed to find something of their own pain connected to my own.

Jesus said *'where your treasure is, there will your heart be also'*. Through my reflection on this experience I have come to the view that:

*Our conversational heart is at the centre when we are on the edge.*

Let me try to explain. As Jesus stated to the Samaritan woman at Jacob's well, he is the Centre person, Time and Eternity intersect in him; Divinity and Humanity meet in him. The Secular and Sacred are made one in him. Triumph and Tragedy embrace in him. And yet ... and yet. When he met the woman at the well he positioned himself on the edge. On the road to Emmaus he was but the travelling companion. On the road to Jerusalem he was on a donkey. Almost unacceptably, both then and now, instead of a throne, he chose a cross.

In the last twelve months, the most profound question put to me was put by a Moslem Imam at a town called Awash on the edge of the Dannikel desert in Ethiopia. *'Brother George'*, he asked, *'where have you and God been travelling since last I saw you? What conversations have you shared together? Let us sit down and talk of these things.'* What I have from God in my recent experience is:

*Our heart is at the centre when we are on the edge.*



The Son of God came not to be served but to serve. True leaders stimulate the conversation by encouraging the one with whom the conversation is being held into the less threatened position. We all know that the best education is self-education. This can only really begin when self-esteem is assured. Leaders nurture the conversation.

### 3. Leaders ensure that none are excluded from the well

As I write this, I have been immensely moved by the skill and courage of the South African helicopter pilots, as they pluck surviving Mozambiquean homeless from the treetops. Mozambique is arguably the poorest country in Africa. South Africa has recently emerged from a way of life where the poor and marginalised were largely ignored. Here we witness great bravery, from troops who a few years ago could not have been presumed to take human life so seriously.

We live in an environment in which the dominant view appears to be that unbridled competition will generate more wealth and that through the generation of such wealth, all will be better off. Reality does not confirm this proposition to be the truth. We know that as a result of free competition there is more wealth, but it is not distributed amongst all. The gap between rich and poor is widening. Indeed, some of the wealth is being stolen from generations yet to be born. [The salt pans of the Murray Darling basin are a very good example]. There are many who are being left by the wayside. The role of the leader is to ensure that everyone takes his or her place at the well.

Competition cannot and should not be the dominant force in economic policy let alone in all human interaction. Competition and co-operation are twins, as are order and chaos. Each sibling contributes to the health and wellbeing of the other. However, just as order is more desired than chaos in the balance of the universe, so also co-operation is, or should be, more dominant than competition in the web of human activity.

So far in Australian school life I do not believe any serious research has been done about the value of community service as a core element in the school curriculum. Imagine if your child in consecutive years did the following:

Year 7	engaged in a Land Care Project;
Year 8	undertook designated community service projects with recognised community service providers;
Year 9	entered Primary Schools to assist with remedial reading and writing;
Year 10	for six weeks joined an Indigenous community in Australia or overseas;
Year 11	established a cyber-cafe for unemployed youth in the local community;
Year 12	devised and ran his / her own community welfare project.

I would suggest such a program, or one like it, would have at least as much value as any academic subject and should be part of the evaluation delivered at the end of Year 12.

We have all grown up with truisms such as '*a chain is as strong as its weakest link*'. However, we have never lived so clearly at a time when this saying is as true for the whole world community as much as it used to be true for the family or village. I used to think that joys as well as pains were equally shared by all. However I now know that not to be true. It is the pains that fundamentally link us, more than the joys. Australian identity has been forged more by Thredbo and Port Arthur, bush fires and floods, than by wins at cricket and football. The reason is that joys are on the whole temporary, unless they are tempered with thankfulness and humility; whereas pain has the potential for lasting redemption. My own inner character and integrity has been influenced more by the events at the end of last year, than by all the more flattering moments of my ministry. As the Magnificat teaches us, it is the poor who redeem the rich, not the other way around. The leader



therefore ensures that disadvantaged persons gain their place at the well, not just for their sake, but for the sake of everyone else.

One of the really great moral dilemmas facing Church schools is the reality that our membership is largely drawn from families with a more strongly focused priority towards education. [We may not always think this when confronted with a relentless round of problems]. However, the reality is that the 66% of children, in the general population being taught in the State Schools, share their class rooms with a larger proportion of children who are not only underprivileged, economically and socially, but who are also underprivileged motivationally and spiritually. This is hardly a problem that you and I can solve; however, it could at least be recognised through a program of outreach, such as I have already suggested.

In some of our Churches we have become used to the principle of the tithe. That is to say, the Church members give a significant proportion of their income [perhaps 10%] to the mission and ministry of the Church. It seems to me not an unreasonable proposition that in the 21st Century, to be considered a citizen, one must be socially responsible. In other words, it will become the accepted view, along with recycling and solar energy, that to be considered a citizen, each able-bodied person will voluntarily give a proportion of their time and talent freely for the benefit of others. At the moment we are sliding in the other direction. Not only is the avoidance of taxes an art form in our culture, but membership of voluntary service organisations is very significantly on the decline. The place to change this point of view is in the school. This is our responsibility.

I have recently been encouraged to read material emanating from the Drucker Foundation which exists to support the 'not for profit' sector of our society. In summary, the Drucker Foundation postulates the view that there are three contributors to our society – Government, Business and Not for Profit. The Foundation postulates that for various reasons, neither government nor business will contribute significantly to the social agenda in years to come. This will largely be the business of the 'not for profit' sector. If this is true, then taken to its logical conclusion, it is the non-government schools that will have the greatest capacity to contribute to the social agenda. This is a U-turn on the normally accepted point of view. It has commonly been accepted that independent schools have run largely with the agenda of the business community; that their modus operandi has been competition and that the end result has been scant attention being paid to the social agenda. How wonderful if this can be seen to be reversed through your schools here in Queensland.

I understand that you now have a significant policy for the education of Indigenous children in your schools. This is very exciting, as long as proper attention is being given to their education, with their needs at the centre.

## Epilogue

Thomas said to him, *'Lord we do not know where you are going, how can we know the way?'* [Jn 14:5]. Earlier in that Chapter Jesus spoke of his departure and of the continuing journey of the disciples. He stressed that he would not finally leave them, but that along the journey he will prepare many resting-places, monai, or watering- holes.

This is the *'road less travelled'*. It is not clearly defined or mapped. It is not made clearer as a result of modern technology or more information. Wealth does not make it more secure. Education will not in itself guarantee a safe arrival. This *'road less travelled'* is attractive because most whom we would want to pause and honour have been down this route before us. It is attractive because we can travel more lightly, without the baggage necessary, if one should take the more common route. The route beckons us because along its meanderings we can make our distinctive contributions and know that these contributions will add value for other travellers. On the other route it is more than likely that the empires we build will be quickly flattened by pursuers snapping at our heels.



If we are unsure of the destination, but know that love is a possibility, why would we not want to travel the *road less travelled*? To travel the other road is to admit defeat; to recognise there is no destiny, only the risky business of a few minor victories along the way, usually achieved at some one else's expense. On the *road less travelled* triumph and tragedy are our constant partners. But around each corner there lies the possibility of discovering that love is not just a possibility but a reality and that in its discovery both triumph and tragedy are swallowed up by something far more precious. At Jacob's well, Jesus said,

... those who drink of the water that I will give them will never be thirsty. The water that I will give will become in them a spring of water gushing up to eternal life.

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Bishop Browning is the current Bishop of the Canberra and Goulburn Diocese. He has enjoyed pilgrimages to the slums of Manilla and a desert in Ethiopia.

