

St Paul's College

Choral Evensong and Liturgical Farewell to the Warden

Thursday 19th September 2019

13th Sunday after Trinity

A Sermon delivered by the Reverend Antony Weiss.

Proverbs 22:1-12, 15, 17-18 and Ephesians 6:10-20

Let the words of my mouth and the meditations of our hearts be acceptable in thy sight, O LORD, our rock and our Redeemer. AMEN.

Dwight D Eisenhower, affectionately known as Ike, served as the 34th president of the United States from 1953 to 1961. During World War II, he was a five-star general and served as Supreme Commander of the Allied Expeditionary Force in Europe. He was responsible for planning and supervising the invasion of North Africa in 1942–43 and the successful Invasion of Normandy in 1944–45

Eisenhower once said this: “War is a terrible thing. But if you’re going to get into it, you’ve got to get into it all the way.”

Even before Don was appointed to take on the reigns of St Paul’s, we knew that the College had somewhat of a fight on its hands.

The College Fellows published a statement on 1st June 2017 acknowledging inexcusable attitudes expressed on social media and that Council needs to [quote] “address the unacceptable culture that it [the social media post] indicates amongst the College’s student body.”

Only a year ago, just after the release of the Broderick Report, St Paul’s College was back in the media. Don is quoted saying on behalf of the College “The Broderick Report shows that, while there is much for the College to be very proud of, including considerable progress in many areas, there are also aspects to be ashamed of. For these matters, we are deeply sorry...” Don continued, “We are utterly determined to be leaders in preventing and responding strongly to sexism, sexual harassment, and sexual assault. We are equally determined to uphold the values of respect and dignity for all, regardless of gender.”

Don has used words of preparedness, caution and warning in his many speeches, meetings (with staff and students) and indeed his addresses, including in Hall tonight. Charged with the

responsibility of leading cultural review, Don was determined to (in Eisenhower speak) get into it “all the way.”

But now that the Warden is moving to St Mark’s College Adelaide, we must not think that we’ve yet gone all the way. There is much that still needs to be done. St Paul’s College has been under public scrutiny and its detractors and newly formed critical friends, given any cause, are locked and loaded, ready to strike at a moment’s notice. Any notion of turning back and the College will definitely have a battle for its survival.

I suspect that dedication to the ongoing cultural renewal of St Paul’s is one of the reasons that Don chose the reading from St Paul’s Letter to the Ephesians, The Whole Armour of God. (He also shared with me that Baroness Thatcher and Sir Winston Churchill both had Ephesians 6 read at their funeral services, so not to be upstaged by the big-guns, it had to be included).

The Apostle Paul ministered to the church at Ephesus (Acts 18:18–21; 19:1–41) writing this letter sometime in AD 60–61 whilst he was in imprisonment in Rome. He had earlier served the saints there for a brief time at the end of his second missionary journey, and then spent more than two years there whilst on his third missionary journey.

Our Second Lesson is Paul’s final exhortation to his Christian brothers and sisters back in Ephesus. Earlier in the letter he calls for them to walk in unity, in holiness, in love, in light and with wisdom (4:1, 17; 5:1-2, 7-8, 15), further relevant virtues we should all seek to live out through our lives within and beyond the College.

Here in Ephesians Chapter 6, Paul’s makes it abundantly clear that there are forces seeking to derail those who have signed up to the truth of the Christian Gospel. Paul presents us with the impending battle but note that it is not so much a battle between land forces or one soldier against another. Rather the battle is between followers of Jesus and forces of darkness, spiritual forces. Verse 12 Paul writes, “For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers over this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places.”

Now the Ephesian church had been a hard-working group of believers full of fortitude and commitment to Christ. They were gate-keepers of the truth and did not compromise with evildoers, and they showed patient endurance in bearing up under hardship.

Yet even they, once strong in the faith, were susceptible to “spiritual forces of evil” something we tend to shy away from or adamantly dismiss out of mind in our western post-modern culture. We discover in the last book of the Bible, the Revelation to John the Divine, that these early Ephesian

Christians did in fact lose some of their zest and zeal for the persevering with the Gospel: “Yet I hold this against you: You have forsaken your first love” (Revelation 2:4). In Revelation Chapter 2, the Ephesian Christians are called to repent: “Remember the height from which you have fallen! Repent and do the things you did at first” (Revelation 2:5). This is was a clarion call from Jesus, for revival in the church and to persevere in the faith.

In his Epistle to the Ephesians, Paul exhorts the Christians there to **be prepared** and secondly, to **engage with the battle at the level at which it is being fought**. And look at the language of readiness, strength, grit and persistence: “be strong, Put on the whole armour of God, be able to stand, wrestle, take up the whole armour of God, be able to withstand, stand firm, take up the shield of faith...the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, praying at all times, keep alert with all perseverance...”

The Apostle Paul couldn't be clearer to his 1st century audience and to us today. There is a battle between good and evil to be fought and followers of Jesus are to sharpen up and know who the real enemy is AND be absolutely clear from where their only enduring strength is sourced, verse 10 “Finally, be strong in the **Lord** and in the strength of his might.” And verse 11 “Put on the whole armour of **God**, that you may be able to stand against the schemes of the devil.” The verse 17, “and take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, **which is the word of God**” for putting trust in anything else is folly.

In verse 13 we read, “Therefore take up the whole armour of God, that you may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand firm.” And that is what we are charged to do here at St Paul's. It may appear that some are looking for an enemy of the College that actually doesn't not exist; remnant reactionaries who tend to think of our nemeses being the *Sydney Morning Herald* or *Honi Soit* or the expansion of the College or the Broderick recommendations. Nothing could be further than reality. But any thought that a change of guard at this point of time is an opportunity to turn the clock back is a fatal mindset and then there would be battles to be fought, unwinnable at that.

Don's conditions of appointment contained these words, “The Warden must promote and uphold the values and behaviour appropriate to a contemporary Anglican College, within the University of Sydney, including genuine respect for women and men alike, and must lead any cultural changes for this.” And it is with this charge, that the Warden has ploughed and scarified the hard topsoil with the support of so many including but not limited to student leaders and staff, fellows past and present, and thus the seeds of cultural change have been sowed and are now taking root. But

the crop needs tending, nurturing watering and weeding by all who remain closely associated with and love St Paul's – Fellows, Staff, Students, Old Paulines and indeed all friends of the College.

When whittled down, it to us being true to what we say that we are and showing integrity and honour by doing what we have promised to do. In the revised St Paul's College Act, the College's Christian foundation and structures are renewed and reaffirmed. We are Christian household in the Anglican tradition where we welcome and embrace students and staff from all faiths or from none on the understanding that we are all made in the image of God; this is a model that sets us apart at this university.

And as a place founded on Jesus' Gospel of repentance and faith, that very same Gospel St Paul (the apostle after whom this College is named) was (in the final verse of the Second Lesson) "an ambassador in chains", we need to take a leaf out of the Apostle's book and do much more to honour our Christian heritage so that "we may declare it boldly..."

To use "Don speak", St Paul's College is to be a modern, outward looking Christian College in the Anglican tradition that needs to be wholly committed to continuing the process for cultural renewal, and to use "St Paul speak" we can only do so if we are a collegiate community that is prepared to "be strong in the Lord and in the strength of his might" for the Word of God in Proverbs 22 charges us to teach the youth about the way they should go; so that even when he is old he will not depart from it.

+In the name of the Father, the Son and the Holt Spirit.

AMEN.