

Service of Commissioning of Bruce Cowan as Master of Salmond Hall
Knox Church, 10.30am, Saturday 26 February, 2000

Readings: Psalm 111
Luke 12:4-7, 22-31

Psalm 111

Praise for God's Wonderful Works

- ¹ Praise the LORD!
I will give thanks to the LORD with my whole heart,
in the company of the upright, in the congregation.
² Great are the works of the LORD,
studied by all who delight in them.
³ Full of honor and majesty is his work,
and his righteousness endures forever.
⁴ He has gained renown by his wonderful deeds;
the LORD is gracious and merciful.
⁵ He provides food for those who fear him;
he is ever mindful of his covenant.
⁶ He has shown his people the power of his works,
in giving them the heritage of the nations.
⁷ The works of his hands are faithful and just;
all his precepts are trustworthy.
⁸ They are established forever and ever,
to be performed with faithfulness and uprightness.
⁹ He sent redemption to his people;
he has commanded his covenant forever.
Holy and awesome is his name.
¹⁰ The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom;
all those who practice it have a good understanding.
His praise endures forever.¹

Luke 12:4-7, 22-31

Exhortation to Fearless Confession
(Mt 10.26—33)

⁴ “I tell you, my friends, do not fear those who kill the body, and after that can do nothing more. ⁵ But I will warn you whom to fear: fear him who, after he has killed, has authority to cast into hell. Yes, I tell you, fear him! ⁶ Are not five sparrows sold for two pennies? Yet not one of them is forgotten in God's sight. ⁷ But even the hairs of your head are all counted. Do not be afraid; you are of more value than many sparrows.

Do Not Worry
(Mt 6.19—21, 25—34)

²² He said to his disciples, “Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat, or about your body, what you will wear. ²³ For life is more than food, and the body more than clothing. ²⁴ Consider the ravens: they neither sow nor reap, they have neither storehouse nor barn, and yet God feeds them. Of how much more value are you than the birds! ²⁵ And can any of you by worrying add a single hour to your

span of life? ²⁶ If then you are not able to do so small a thing as that, why do you worry about the rest? ²⁷ Consider the lilies, how they grow: they neither toil nor spin; yet I tell you, even Solomon in all his glory was not clothed like one of these. ²⁸ But if God so clothes the grass of the field, which is alive today and tomorrow is thrown into the oven, how much more will he clothe you—you of little faith! ²⁹ And do not keep striving for what you are to eat and what you are to drink, and do not keep worrying. ³⁰ For it is the nations of the world that strive after all these things, and your Father knows that you need them. ³¹ Instead, strive for his kingdom, and these things will be given to you as well. ⁱⁱ

The Salmond Hall Project

1 Introduction

“Don’t worry about life – about what to eat, what to wear” This wasn’t advice your mother gave you when you came to Otago University. Yet could have something to say to those waiting for WINZ / enrolment, needing to ask for food vouchers.

Why did Jesus give it to his students?

I guess that for them and for us, **finding out what is really worth worrying about** and what is not, is part of why we are in communities such as they were and we are.

At this commissioning for Bruce, it is appropriate we express our gratitude to you for taking on this responsibility. While it may also appear to you a wonderful opportunity, it is a challenge not that many are equal to.

Anyone who takes on the leadership of a hall of residence needs all the help they can get. The support of the university, other halls of residence, churches, and the wider community.

Halls of residence are part of the quality of the Otago educational experience. While Otago desperately needs more bases of employment than education, whatever the future of this region holds, it demands that the quality of what Dunedin does do, continues to be done well. (also compensation for the water and the weather)

Dunedin has something which no other tertiary center in New Zealand has been able to match. In Auckland University the School of Engineering the strength of identity continues to be more robust because of the community experience which shaped its traditions during the 20 years it was located at Ardmore aerodrome.

At times the community experience borders on the fantastic – as in fantasy – a sort of extended adolescence combined with the educational self-directed values of preschool – yet like many games, even including those at Carrisbrook, it seriously equips people for life. Bruce: its your job to shape that process. It’s a process where each Master makes a contribution.

2 Why are these Halls of Residence here?

Not just to provide a setting for a sense of high adventure in communities which can be mobilized instantly to descend like Vikings on the unsuspecting. A place where the heady feeling of boundaryless existence can be moderated in some semblance of civilization.

There could be many mundane reasons. Despite the fees, they are not about making money. Hard to say how much it is about concern for morals of the young and newly free. In the case of Knox College it was about providing a real world experience for future Presbyterian ministers, a function which is now redundant.

It seems a long way from Jesus' life and example to decisions about buildings, but there is a connection for many of the Halls that are part of the gift of Dunedin to New Zealand and much further afield.

Scots and education

Scottish belief in education as almost as a religion goes a long way back. The ideals are easily romanticized, and the reality always more gritty and complicated, but John Knox's vision of a school in every parish contributed to an open education system. By the 18th century the democratic intellect of Scotland's universities made it the intellectual center of Europe in Science and philosophy, though it is true that the English competition at the time was not great. Still the Scots did not have everything. The young Gladstone was sent to Edinburgh to get an education and then to Cambridge to meet the right people.

In the Scottish mind, sin and ignorance were closely related, and so too was education and salvation in every sense – spiritual, social, economic and Scientific. James Clerk Maxwell (1831-1879)ⁱⁱⁱ took verse 2 of Ps 111 as his personal motto – his work as a mathematician and theoretical physicist had a solid religious base. Students and missionaries took Scottish common sense philosophy and started universities around the world, almost as if you had nothing else to do on a Sunday afternoon you would plan to open one the following week.

Mary and J D Salmond

The Salmond family after whom Salmond Hall is named, particularly the sister and brother Mary Salmond (1887-1976) and James David (J. D. / Fishy) Salmond (1898-1976) were deeply rooted in this tradition.^{iv} They came from a Queenstown Scottish family that had migrated to Otago not long after the gold rushes in Central.

Mary taught in primary schools in Southland and gained an MA in 1914. She was a missionary teacher in India and did further study in the States. In 1919 she became Principal of the Presbyterian Women's Training Institute here in Dunedin. She strove for greater recognition of women in the church, visiting Europe for research, and advocating women elders some decades before the Church was willing to accept women as other than deaconesses. She herself became one of the first woman elders in St Andrews Queenstown. When Salmond Hall was first opened in 1971 it was in part for training women for the Presbyterian ordained ministry. At that time it was still not possible for women to use the dining room at Knox College.

Mary's younger brother David gained his MA at Otago in 1920, trained as a teacher at the Dunedin Teacher's Training College, and completed a doctorate on the early history of the Labour movement in 1928. His interests in education and community welfare took him to the States and Europe and even Communist Russia as the Depression broke. In 1931 he was appointed Youth Director of the Presbyterian Church and was ordained into the position despite, for all his training, not having done any formal theological education. In 1948 he became secretary of the Theological Hall which helped him ensure not too many others got in the same way he had, and that he had freedom to maintain his commitments to education and community welfare. He led a committee on unemployment which was critical of government policy in the early 30s, set up leadership training schools and the first ecumenical youth conference. He helped set up ecumenical chaplaincy at Otago and was a member of the Council of the University for 8 years. He was a person of an era, a great character and a great campaigner, not least for the building of the community which now bears his family name. I personally only met him once – he advised me to always go to a meeting prepared with what you want to see happen. You can usually be sure nobody else has.

We live in different times and face different challenges. But there are clues in the Mary and J D Salmond to things that remain important for our own lives and for the sorts of communities we seek to create in Halls of Residence and in wider society.

3 The fear of the Lord is the beginning of Wisdom

It is easy to think of earlier generations being dominated by hang-ups about sexuality, preoccupations with rules, and an attitude to God and religion which was governed by more than a slight element of fear. There certainly are those who illustrate the stereotype. There are also those who give lie to it.

The telling phrase, “the fear of the Lord is the beginning of Wisdom” is found in Psalms and Proverbs and is part of a Wisdom tradition which counter-balances the idea that God and life is about keeping rules – a system whereby those who keep the regulations get blessed, and those who slip up get zapped.

The Wisdom tradition does not deny the value of law, but it works at the boundaries of its limitations, and points to something different. In Ecclesiastes, Proverbs and elsewhere in the Hebrew Bible there is an acknowledgement that there are many situations in life which need a wisdom which reaches beyond regulations which have their relevance in situations which have changed.

The word “fear”^v is not about being terrified, or even anxiety, but it is about respect. Ps 111v9 – “Holy and awesome”

God is not to be feared as in a horror movie / Blairwitch Project – respect akin to those experienced mountaineers have for the mountains, and sailors or scuba divers have for the sea. There is a power there. It is to be engaged with. It is to be enjoyed. It is a relationship. But there is respect.

Jesus' words take this a stage further. For his students and students today, there was plenty to be anxious about. Not everyone is laidback, and the laidback are not always

as they appear. There are anxieties and fears in most of us, and we need to look out for those for whom they are no joke at all.

Jesus' turning these anxieties aside, is not ignoring them, so much as putting them into perspective.

There is something more important than food and clothing. It has more than a little to do with acknowledging the wisdom that we need, and the source. It is important to listen to conscience, to the voice of God, acknowledge that wherever we are with church, that relationship is still at work. The awesomeness of God is the beginning of wisdom.

4 Conclusion

Bruce

- being master is in a noble tradition
- not easy
- most have a rough ride at some point
- challenge of creating traditions which give people space and yet provide a safety net and also boundaries which if crossed (to use the carefully crafter words of the present master of Knox College "you will then have the privilege of exercising your skills in some other residence in Dunedin.

Students

- test out what is to be taken seriously – what is to be feared and what is not
- enjoy the adventure
- discover who you are and be good at it
- learn from your mistakes – we all make them
- look out for the lonely and anxious
- learn to talk about anything, including religion
- don't be put off by the failures of Christians and churches from making your own explorations into what Jesus was all about
- like J D Salmond think about the community / working people / issues of justice and the world beyond this privileged place.
- I was going to say "use sunscreen" I have yet to discover how much need there is for that in Dunedin.

ⁱ *The New Revised Standard Version*, (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson Publishers) 1989.

ⁱⁱ *The New Revised Standard Version*, (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson Publishers) 1989.

ⁱⁱⁱ Nigel M. de S. Cameron, ed. *Dictionary of Scottish Church History and Theology*. Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1993, p.554.

^{iv} J. D. Salmond [his address at the commissioning of Ruth Page as Warden of Salmond Hall, and a memorial minute by J. S. Somerville]. *Southern People*, pp.439-441. Duncan Macleod, *J. D. Salmond's Contribution to Religious Education in New Zealand*, dissertation in church history, University of Otago Faculty of Theology, 1991.

^v R. Earle, "Fear" in Walter A. Elwell, ed. *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology*, Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1984, p.409. See also "Awe" *ibid.*, p.109.