Principally Principled Principal

Readings: Proverbs 3:1-6; Matthew 5:1-10

As we gather for installation of Judith Tudbaill as the Principal of St. Michael’s Collegiate from all areas of the school, staff, student, old girls, representatives of other school we all come with great hopes for her.

But I suspect that some of those hopes will not sit easily alongside each other. Some will want to see her focus on the staff, others on the girls. Some will see the business side of the school, others will look for the focus to be on pedagogy. Some will look for continuing academic excellence, others a wider view of the educative programme. Some will be looking for great changes, others will not want to see any.

The task to which Judith has been called and which she is to undertake is not by any means an easy one with many competing expectations and demands. Above all then we will be praying that Judith will have clear understanding of her vision and values as she undertakes the role of head of this great school.

In short we are looking for principally a principled Principal.

Collegiate itself has principles, with its motto of Beati Mundo Cordi – Blessed are the pure in heart. This forms part of the Beatitudes the introduction to the Sermon on the Mount at the end which Jesus says that to follow these words of his is the way of wisdom and, to coin a phrase be set for life.

The principles of the Beatitudes then should recommend themselves principally to the incoming Principal.

As we briefly consider the Beatitudes I hope that we will not only encourage Judith to be principally a principled Principal but we will all have cause to ponder the principles of our own life and which ones are truly principal.

### BASIC PRINCIPLES

The Beatitudes were not given by Jesus as a collection of pious thoughts to put on a tea towel or to put up on the fridge next to “Footprints” or “The Serenity Prayer”. They are given by Jesus as his ministry starts to show the kind of community that should be created by those who follow him.

**Blessing**

Jesus says that this is the way of blessing. This means something deeper than “Happy”. For something to be blessed is to say yes to it to commend it, and clearly the blessing is being done by God here.

So rather than simply pointing the way to be happy more deeply Jesus is describing the kind of life of which God approves, which gets God’s tick of approval, God’s way of being set for life, the life of his kingdom, the way of wisdom.

It is worth listening again to these famous words as not just a list of attitudes to admire in others but as a radical set of principles on which we are to base our life and our community.

**The Beatitudes**

_Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven._
_Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted._
_Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth._
_Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled._
_Blessed are the merciful, for they will be shown mercy._
Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God.
Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God.
Blessed are those who are persecuted because of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

Basic outline
We do not have time this evening to consider each of these in detail. But we can see that this is a profoundly challenging vision. A way that embraces humility, mourning not just with the bereaved but over the state of our world, rejects self focus but longs to live God’s way; a way that embraces mercy, purity and reconciliation.
Which of those principles do you find most challenging? Can you imagine what Collegiate would look like if it lived out these principles?
Perhaps the best way to consider the radical nature of these to consider how our world would write its own beatitudes. I had a go.

Our World’s Beatitudes
Blessed are the rich in possessions for theirs is the Kingdom of this world.
Blessed are those who are unconcerned for they shall not be troubled.
Blessed are the powerful for they shall take the inheritance of others and get away with it.
Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for material wealth for there will always be more to get.
Blessed are the hardhearted for they shall obtain whatever they want no matter the cost.
Blessed are the celebrities for they shall be seen by everybody.
Blessed are the entertained for they shall be called children of television.
Blessed are those who are always comfortable for then they are truly at home in the Kingdom of this world.

It is because Jesus vision is so different from the world’s view that Jesus brings in the issue of persecution. If we live by principles that are not only different from the world around but reveal its shallow nature then it should not be a surprise that the world doesn’t like it.
You may have never thought about it but by Collegiate having the Beatitudes as its basic principles rather than being an establishment school that prepares girls to enter society it really should be constantly challenging accepted ways of the establishment and producing graduates who in their thinking and living fundamentally challenge the principles of the society in which they will live. They should be set to live differently.
Judith if you are to be principally a principled Principal these are the principles you are to embrace and we pray you will promote at Collegiate.

BLESSED ARE THE POOR IN SPIRIT
This is a daunting task, and you may wonder if you are up to it. But this is part of the path to living them out.
In the first Beatitude which sets the tone for the rest Jesus describes as blessed, approved of by God, those who are poor in spirit. It is a phrase that we often hear but what does it mean?
A good answer is found in the wisdom book of Proverbs (3:5-6).
Trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways submit to him, and he will make your paths straight.
Part of the your principles should be to keep coming back in humility before God recognising your need of him.
Again this is quite a counter to our culture. My daughter used to wear a T Shirt that says, “Last time I checked the world does revolve around me!” It is so easy to live
this way but we are to follow a different path and put God in his rightful place. It is making this decision of putting God in his right place that is the entry into the Kingdom, that we are not principal is the primary principle.

You put this principle into action when you pray and when you read and listen to God’s world. Their will be many voices calling for your attention you will need spend time listening to God for this is the way of blessing.

This is a good principle for us all.

**EXAMPLE OF BEING SET OF LIFE**

The other principle is not only to consider the teaching of Jesus which is extraordinary in itself but to look to his example. If we were to read further on in Matthew’s Gospel we would see that the Beatitudes were not just something that Jesus taught but they are also something that he lived by. To be precise he lived by them he died for them. Or to be even more precise he lived it, died for it and rose again because of them.

In so doing Jesus fully demonstrated the Kingdom of God and calls us to trust in his ways. We will express our faith in the saving power of his death and resurrection when we take communion together later in this service.

But Jesus by his life death and principally his resurrection demonstrates that the way of life taught in the Beatitudes truly is blessed, it is the way of life that God approves, it gives us true hope that the ways of mercy, reconciliation, justice and service are truly the way to be set for life, and to be set for the life of God’s eternal kingdom.

So when the way becomes hard as a first principle lean not on your own understanding but keep coming back to Jesus, his teaching, his example and his resurrection and you will be principally a principled Principal and be a great blessing to this School and the wider community.