

Welcome

Call to Worship

We gather this day to worship God whose words and ways challenge us. God invites us to lose our selfishness to find ourselves. God invites us to be at peace with each other. Wherever we have come from and whatever we believe, God welcomes us and invites us into conversation.

Hymn: One more step along the world I go

Introduction to Reading: (Student)

Following the death of Moses, Joshua is commissioned to be the new leader of Israel. For 40 years the Israelite people had been wandering about the Sinai desert in search of the promised land... finally they arrive at the edge of the Jordan River and Joshua is given the task of leading the people across to take possession of the land they have been searching for... it is a difficult task that will involve hardship and loss.

Our reading this morning contains words of encouragement to Joshua at this time... these words are a reminder to us that God is with us in all that lies ahead...

Reading: Joshua 1: 9

Sermon

How were your holidays? Did you get on a plane and go in search of a warmer climate? Did you head for the Bach? Perhaps you just hung out at home and read a good book, saw a movie, rode your bike, enjoyed having a little less structure to your day...how were your holidays? I hope you had fun, I hope you feel rested and ready to enjoy a new Term – I wonder what it will bring – I wonder what lies ahead as we take one more step along the way.

I had a fairly quiet holiday, but did manage a couple of adventures – a bit of fishing and a family trip to Waiwera hot pools for the day...they were my holiday highlights. Waiwera is the kind of place I only seem to get to every ten years but it doesn't seem to change much – still the same array of pools at varying temperatures and still the same slides which despite my years I had to have a couple of go's on. How many of you have been to Waiwera? What are the names of the different slides – can anyone remember? (Black hole, Gut buster, ...?)

Well I'm not sure which one it was but one of them I went far too fast on and flew out the end on some funny angle and bounced along the concrete bottom of the pool on my back and ended up with a nice big bandage on my back...

I was a bit sore for a few days afterwards but still it was a lot of fun...

Actually it reminded me a bit of school life... hopping into the slide is like beginning a new term you know where your heading but you can't necessarily see the end, the pace, the action, the twists and turns, the excitement, the laughter and the odd bump and bruise you get along the way!

I wonder what twists and turns lie ahead for us this term – what will be the challenges we face, what will we need to overcome, what laughs will we have along the way – what are we aiming for, how will we get the most out of this term?

I think one way to answer these questions is to look at our new value for the next couple of weeks: Excellence. Who can give me a succinct definition of this word? What does excellence mean?

Striving to do the best you can do – striving to be the best you can be – giving life your all...

These are all important aspects of 'excellence' – they focus on you as an individual and what you need to do to ensure you get the most out of life – the most out of your slide! But this morning I would like to talk to you about a slightly different perspective on excellence – excellence not as an

individual action but excellence as a community action.

What do I mean by excellence as a community action? Let me tell you a story to help explain. The story is about a man called Dietrich Bonhoeffer, a German scholar who lived during the Second World War. In his early years Bonhoeffer had studied in New York and seen first hand the racism that was prevalent at the time between some of the white American people towards people whose skin was black. Bonhoeffer believed that striving for excellence meant not just striving to get all he could out of life but striving to make sure others too also got all they could out of life – racism was an injustice and black American's were being treated as if they were less human than white Americans and Bonhoeffer had the courage to stand up and fight against this injustice... to ensure that all people would have the chance to succeed not just him...

...his courage and willingness to stand up against what he believed was wrong ended up with his being placed in prison after he became involved in a resistance movement to overthrow Hitler – the leader of Germany whose racist policies under Nazism were causing the death of anyone of Jewish descent. Bonhoeffer could not stand by and enjoy the privileges that were his as a white German scholar – he could not strive for his own excellence, for his own gain when there were

people who were being mistreated and who it was within his power to help – at the heart of excellence for Bonhoeffer was the idea that life was not so much about what you can get out of it but rather about what you can put in...what you can contribute.

Just before he was killed he wrote the following words in a letter: ***“To do and dare – not what you would, but what is right. Never to hesitate over what is within your power, but boldly to grasp what lies before you.”***

What does this story tell us? It tells us to do and dare – not just what we can do for our own benefit but what is right. As we begin another Term, as we stand at the top of the slide and get ready to take the plunge we have the opportunity to think about how we are going to approach all that lies ahead – are we going to give it our all and be the best we can be? Can we also like Bonhoeffer did be committed to helping those around us be all they can be too, our classmates, our team-mates, our friends and even those we find it hard to like – can we strive for excellence as a community so that we can all get to the end of the term with a sense of achievement and satisfaction?

I think we can. But to do so will take courage and determination...it isn't easy to stand up for someone in the playground who is being picked

on or excluded, it is much easier to stay silent, it isn't easy helping others, it is much easier to just concentrate on helping yourself, it isn't easy to play as a team, it is much easier to just go it alone ...but despite the challenge, despite the fact that it is harder it is always **worth** doing what is right ... their will be twists and turns and even the odd bump and bruise along the way but it will still be worth it and true excellence will be within your grasp.

Let us pray:

Loving God we give you thanks for our holiday break and we ask at the beginning of another term for the strength and courage that you gave to Joshua when he led the people into the promised land – help us to think not only of what we can gain from being here but what we can contribute to this community and to all whose lives we encounter...thank you that we can hold onto the promise that you gave to Joshua, that you gave to Dietrich Bonhoeffer – to not be frightened or dismayed for you are with us every step of the way.

Music for Reflection

Prayers

Sung Lord's Prayer

Benediction and Threefold Amen

Go from this place striving for excellence, be courageous in standing up for the rights of others, never hesitate to do what is right in the knowledge that God is with you every step of the way.