

Readings – John 13: 4-15, (Lachlan White) Romans 12:1-8 (Henry Mellor), Samuel 12: 20-24 (James Haldane)

Headmaster, Rev. 'Alifeleti 'Atiola, Deputy Principals, Rev. Longunisi Tu'ipulotu and Rev. Simonta Paongo,, Head Tutor, Rev. Likio Atiola, staff of Tupou College, my colleagues of Newington College, Head Prefect and Prefects of Tupou College, students and guests:

It is a blessing and an honour to be speak at this beautiful service, and in this venerable Chapel, named in honour of Rev. Dr. James Egan Moulton, founding headmaster of Newington College and Tupou College, to whom we owe thanks for this long and enriching relationship between our two great schools.

The staff and students of Newington College are humbled to share this day of rest and prayer with Tupou College.

We are humbled by your hospitality – we have landed in a foreign country and you have welcomed us home.

We are humbled by Tongan people's reverence of God, by your devotion to prayer and by your service to Him through music, through sport and through learning.

At times, we are embarrassed. As I'm sure Mr Cameron Quince has explained on occasions, it is not customary in Australian culture to treat visitors with such veneration – it is difficult to receive all that you give us.

Families of Tupou College, you have given up your beds and linen so that the students of Newington College may sleep comfortably; you have prepared and served us great feasts and insisted we have our fill before you, yourselves, eat – you have greatly honoured us; such hospitality is overwhelming and we find it difficult at times to accept this level of generosity.

The notion that a visitor sits at the top of a highly respected hierarchy is foreign to most Australians.

Why is this the case? Why do Australian's find generous hospitality (not difficult to acknowledge but) difficult to receive?

Perhaps it is because Australia, throughout its young history as nation, has resisted hierarchy and embraced a larrikin sense of egalitarianism. We are not, as Tonga is, a proud kingdom. With the exception of our proud Aboriginal people, Australian lineages and history do not run as deep as yours, and so we respect our elders and leaders less. We call each other "mate" and we cut down our "tall poppies". We do not like to put people on pedestals and we do not like being put on a pedestal. What is unfortunately lost in Australia is that sense of what it means to be a suppliant – we've lost what it means to bow, to kneel before a King, to throw yourself down at the altar and ask for mercy from one more powerful than you. We, as Australians, are sometimes too proud to come to God on our knees and let Him wash us free of sin.

In today's Gospel reading, Jesus, 'Lord and Teacher', washes his disciples' feet – a menial task reserved for slaves. Jesus 'sets [us] an example that [we] should do as [He] has done'. The Tupou College community has mirrored Jesus' example – you have been willing to perform every service for us and for one another.

Like the disciple Peter in the reading, Newington wants to say, 'No', your selflessness and generosity is too much. But there is an important realisation we must come to – the hospitality of Tupou College teaches us a lot about God and the grace of Jesus Christ. Like your hospitality, grace is abundant, free-flowing and filled with goodness – and yes, the relationship may seem so incredibly unequal and the circumstances so unfair, but it is an example of selflessness that, I believe, can save the world.

What shall we, the Newington guests, do now that such an example of God's grace has been set before us?

This is the same challenge the Apostle Paul lays down in his letter to the Romans. Shall we continue our lives of sin, greed and entitlement so that the grace of God and others' generosity may increase? No. Paul writes, 'Do not conform any longer to the pattern of the world, but be *transformed*.'

In chapter 12 of his letter to the Romans, Paul turns to the practical application of all his teachings so far, and I'd like to meditate on one or two of his comments.

Paul writes, 'Do not think of yourself more highly than you ought, but rather think of yourself with sober judgement.' Please, count your blessings – your health, your family, your wealth, your talents – and be proud of whom and what you serve – your College, your teammates, your new friends – but do not mistake your blessings as entitlements and reciprocities. Since your blessings come from God, there is no basis for a superior attitude or self-righteousness. You simply are, as Paul puts it, 'living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God'.

Paul acknowledges our individual strengths and weaknesses, our various and different 'gifts' – then he writes, 'Be devoted to one another in brotherly love. Honour one another above yourselves.' Here, to describe 'brotherly love', Paul uses the Greek word, 'philos', meaning a love that is founded on tangible and very real acts of loyalty (as opposed simply to 'passion' or 'romance') – and it is this practical form of love that Tupou College and Newington College have and must continue to display for each other.

In Psalm 72, it says the Lord 'will deliver the needy who cry out.' Since Jesus has risen to heaven, the responsibility of that promise falls to us. In the words of St Teresa of Avila,

'Christ has no body now on earth but yours,
No hands but yours,
No feet but yours,
Yours are the eyes through which is to look out Christ's compassion to the world;
Yours are the feet with which he is to go about doing good;
Yours are the hands with which he is to bless men now.'

There is a saying we use at the Newington College Boarding House: 'I can't hear what you're saying because your actions speak so loudly.' Tupou College, your actions have resonated loudly and echo God's love more than my words possibly could.

Thanks be to God for the enduring fellowship between our two great schools.

To Rev. 'Alfeleti 'Atiola, headmaster of Tupou College, and to Dr David Mulford, headmaster of Newington College, thank you for nourishing the vision of a shared future.

To Rev. Aisake Haukinima, Rev. Simonta Paongo and Head Prefect, Tevita Okusi, thank you for your friendly welcome and heartfelt guidance these last four days.

To the wonderful women and boys who have prepared our meals and our beds, your gracious hospitality inspires us – thank you.

To Rev Uikilifi Tonga & Elone Niu, thank you for your wonderful music – it lifts our hearts to a more spiritual place.

And to Mr Cameron Quince, thank you for your enthusiasm, advocacy and leadership.

On a final more personal note, I'd like to address the families of scholarship recipients Vunipola Fifita, Temelie Lemani, Sioasi Atiola, Teu Atiola and Isilele Halaufa– you have entrusted your sons and brothers to Newington and Newington's Boarding House and we are honoured. As a Boarding Master, I and my wife, Amanda, will come away from this trip with the conviction to do all that we can to ensure your sons are reminded of and maintain their proud culture.

May God bless you all.