



St Mark's College

2019 Final Service Sermon Reverend Grant Moore

In the name of God: Creator, Redeemer, and Sustainer. Amen.

To begin with, I have a promise to keep. Six months ago, I told Layla Mahdi, our Scholar in Residence and internationally acclaimed microbiologist, that I'd give her a travel tip in this final sermon since she'd be flying home soon after. So, here it is, Layla, courtesy of an incident I read about recently.

A married couple were queued up at an airport check-in counter. Suddenly the husband said, "I wish we'd brought the piano!" "Don't be stupid!" his wife snapped, "What on earth for? Anyway, we've got enough stuff already." "I know," the husband said, "but our passports and tickets are on the piano!" Layla don't forget your travel documents. But if you do, I'm sure it's a lesson you'll only need once.

Let me introduce a man now, who rarely needs a ticket or a passport. Why? Because he walks everywhere! Mega-adventurer, Jon Muir, the only man to have walked alone and unassisted, from one side of this vast continent to the other. Muir too, has had a lesson he's only needed once.

Forty years ago, he was rock-climbing on Mount Arapiles in western Victoria when his climbing partner dislodged a two-tonne rock. The rock struck him in the back, breaking his ribs and puncturing both lungs. Muir remembers being conscious of only two things. He couldn't breathe, and he was dying.

His distraught partner began CPR, but it was no use. Muir was gone! "What happened next," he says, "changed my life forever. Suddenly, I discover I've drifted away from my body and I'm looking down on myself, dead on the cliff. I'm floating up and as I get further away, the image starts getting blurry and I get smaller and smaller. Then it just fades away."

What happened, doctors told him, was that his body had made one last attempt to restart. Somehow, he'd got a pinch of air into the bottom of one lung and he was back from the dead. Muir reckons that dying was the best thing that ever happened to him. "I realised that day," he says, "that life is a precious gift and that I had to make the most of it."

Not everyone would agree with Jon Muir. I certainly have a different perspective when it comes to normal gift-giving. If I give you a gift, I think it's your business what you do with it. I'm not like a well-meaning great aunt, checking to see if you're wearing that mustard yellow cardigan you got last Christmas. If I'd given it to you, and you donated it to Anglicare, I would not be offended.

But the gift of life is different. You only have to hear the psalm Nick read to realise that God, like the great aunt, is very interested in what we do with the precious gift of our lives. But God

has a foot in both camps. Our lives are ours to do as we please with, nevertheless, scripture tells us, we will, eventually, have to account for them. Maybe that's what Jon Muir was on his way to do.

As for exactly how you invest yours, it's not for me to say. The analogy that Darren read to us certainly offers a clue. But when it comes to the big issues that are going to occupy your generation, I don't think I'm overly "woke." In fact, probably the opposite, whatever that is. "Dozed" maybe!

But I am, I think, reasonably "eco-woke" you can't teach Geography for forty years and not be aware of what's looming like a dark cloud on the horizon. Anthropogenic climate change! Some people are sick of hearing about it, but it's no longer the elephant in the room, it's a herd of elephants! Theologian, Sally McFague calls it, the issue of the twenty-first century.

For those still in denial, and as we know, that includes some very powerful and influential people, climate science is not some faddish, radical green plot to undermine our collective well-being. On the contrary! It's an epic, altruistic endeavour in protracted, taxing, teamwork, armies of researchers spending countless hours on desolate field sites and in dingy laboratories. The resultant 97% scientific consensus that we have a potentially serious problem on our hands, cannot be lightly dismissed.

And it's no good saying, as some biblical fundamentalists are wont to do, "Don't worry about environmental degradation and the rising oceans. God will soon pluck us from a doomed Earth and whisk us to eternal safety." Such thinking conveniently ignores God's very specific mandate for humankind to care for the Earth. That still counts in spite of whatever the divine plan for the future might be.

In the meantime, what to do? I doubt that super-gluing yourself to the pavement is a long-term solution. And it's pointless raging against earlier generations. You could go right back to James Watt and his first reliable steam engine. Or you could just blame the British, full stop! After all, it was they who spread their industrial innovations via an empire on which the sun never set.

Interestingly, I was at a conference recently where the views of a black, Botswanan theologian were quoted. "The reason the sun never set on the British Empire," he said, "is because God didn't trust them in the dark." No wonder, given the Industrial Revolution's unforeseen and potentially calamitous climate consequences.

How you budding movers and shakers of the future engage with the existential angst of the 21st century is, of course, entirely up to you. But here's what one of your colleagues thinks.

A few weeks ago, Ellie and I had breakfast with Alex Makarowsky in London. Macca, by the way, sends his greetings to all of you. Macca, as we know, is a prodigious talent, and he said that ultimately, he sees himself devoting his life to helping find some viable solutions to our climate dilemma.

Who better than Macca and yourselves? Being uni students, much is expected of you. As Simon Collins says, no institutions play a bigger part in the socio-economic futureproofing of human society than universities. That's where tomorrow's scientific breakthroughs and technological innovations are incubated. And who knows what they will be? Their embryonic templates lie buried in you, as yet undiscovered, hidden among the unique talents with which you've been blessed.

In the final analysis, your life is God's precious gift to you. What you do with it, is your gift to the rest of us, to humankind in general, and in the end, to God. And you know what I hope? I hope you'll never need to be hit by a two-tonne rock to be reminded of it.