

It's Never Too Late

I heard a story on the radio recently that really captured my interest. The story concerned a Dutch sailing ship, the Henrietta that in 1803 set sail from Cape Town in South Africa on the homeward journey to the Netherlands. The Henrietta was on the last leg of a journey around the world collecting spices, clothing, ornaments, pottery and all manner of goods from each of the countries it visited. The Henrietta could have expected a safe trip home, barring shipwreck or misadventure. However, England was at war with France in 1803 and the Netherlands was an ally of France and not England. Soon after leaving Cape Town, the Henrietta was intercepted by an English warship. Although the ship and her crew were spared, the entire cargo was confiscated by the English.

The interesting part of this story is that one of the crew of the Henrietta kept a notebook describing in detail his travels and each of the places visited. Moreover, in the back of that leather notebook was a small bag of seeds that the owner had collected. Now the notebook and the seeds made their way back to England and were kept by the English sailor. Indeed, the notebook was obviously interesting enough to be kept in the sailor's family for the next 200 hundred years.

Six months ago, the descendants of that sailor thought that the bag of seeds in the back of the notebook might be of interest to botanists at the famous Kew Gardens in London. You can imagine the surprise when the bag of seeds arrived. The botanists soon identified over 30 types of seeds and then decided to see if they could get them to grow. To their astonishment, a number of plants have been grown from those seeds, including the King Protea, the national flower of South Africa. After 200 years of being dormant, the seeds germinated. I can imagine the excitement at seeing the flowers of plants that were common 200 years ago. The next piece of research for the botanists is to see if any of the plants are different in any way to the same species that are found today.

The point of this story is that for those seeds it is never too late, although, we must wonder if the seeds would have germinated after 300 or 500 years. The expression 'it's never too late' is one that we use frequently in the English language. Indeed, the famous English novelist Mary Anne Evans, who wrote under the pen-name George Elliot, is quoted as saying "*It's never too late to be who you might have been*".

The start of the New Year in the Western World often comes with a set of New Year's resolutions. A New Year resolution is a commitment that a person makes, often involving a lifestyle change that is generally seen as being advantageous. Many resolutions focus on being fit and healthy and in the case of adults often include giving up smoking and exercising regularly. Other worthwhile resolutions include spending more time with family and friends; enjoying life more; helping others; getting more organised; and learning something new. Other noble pledges include helping the poor or working toward protecting our environment.

But resolutions are not only set at the start of the New Year festivals. Many of you may have returned to school on the 1st September with a set of resolutions for this academic

school year. The reasons for your setting a new set of goals may have something to do with a less-than-satisfactory school report last July or a poor Conduct Grade. Other resolutions, however, may have been set because you really want to do something different this year, for example: learning another language, being chosen for the Chinese Orchestra; being selected for the Swimming Team; improving your grades in all subjects; completing your homework and handing-in all assignments; staying focused in class; eating sensibly and exercising more regularly.

These commitments, be they starting on the 1st January or the 1st September, ought to remain in place until they have been achieved. Some people are quite successful in following through with their resolutions until the goals have been reached. Unfortunately, many resolutions go unachieved and are often broken shortly after they are set. I wonder how many of us in the assembly this morning can give an example of a resolution that we have broken. Maybe the challenge was too difficult and possibly unrealistic in the first place. Maybe the circumstances have changed and it is now impossible for us to continue. However, I would suggest that many of us may simply have 'given up' when the going became too tough. Indeed, we may have gone back to our old ways: eating too much fast food; not handing in assignments on the due date; sleeping in class; spending a minimum amount of time on exercise, and so forth.

There are consequences, however, when we ease back on a resolution or even worse, give up completely. You see, our personal resolutions often impact on others. When we join the Choir or the Orchestra or the Scouts or the Red Cross or the Badminton Team or the Saturday morning enhancement classes or any of the Student Association clubs, we make a commitment to other people as well as to ourselves. Regular attendance, active participation and a desire to do your best are resolutions that each of you must take very seriously. Do not let yourself or others down by not showing commitment and dedication. If you have been falling down in any of these areas, it's never too late. Identify where you might have gone wrong and aim to put them right.

It is also never too late to experience the word of God and to embrace His love in your life. If you would like to draw up a new set of resolutions, and would like them to have real meaning and purpose, then a good place to start is the Lord's Prayer. We say the Lord's Prayer on Page 2 at most assemblies but I would suggest that we tend to read the words without giving much thought to what they mean. There are 12 lines in the version of the prayer that we say at St. Paul's College. The Lord's Prayer needs to be read slowly and clearly. Each of the 12 lines has a significant meaning. However, too often we rush through the prayer without really thinking about what we are saying. Indeed, the sentence that needs to be spoken with greatest thought is the final sentence "For the kingdom, the power and the glory are Yours now and forever". You might even pause after the word "Yours" to stress that we are talking about "now and forever".

We should remember that in all that we do, it's never too late.

jrk