



It's The Season To Be...

No doubt, we would all have seen recent media coverage of the publication of Year 12 students' ATAR results, with all the usual coverage of students who did exceptionally well, as well as which schools performed best overall. Indeed, this is an annual "media event" that regularly captures the front page of our newspapers and features heavily in broadcast news bulletins.

I must confess to having somewhat ambiguous feelings about this coverage. While, on the one hand, I am happy for those students and schools who have done well, on the other hand, I wonder about those students who really worked hard and tried their best but who, for whatever reason, didn't get the score they were after or haven't been accepted into the course they aspired to. I wonder how they feel watching the celebratory coverage lauding those who've achieved high results - I worry that they must feel like they are failures, or disappointments to others, or that they haven't lived up to expectations, and that their ATAR score is a reflection on their worth and character as a human being.

Likewise, I wonder how the media treatment of the overall results achieved by schools disguises the inequalities caused by class and economics, of the inequitable distribution of resources between urban and rural areas, and between wealthy and poorer suburbs. As the parent of a child who has the privilege of attending a private school, I wonder how this reflects the general trend of ascribing negative moral and personal attributes to low test scores, and

how we tend to "blame the victim" rather than accept the social responsibility of inequality of educational opportunity.

Of course, "happiness sells". In our commercialised and commoditised culture, "upbeat" is the preferred - almost compulsory - setting for these sort of events. We "must" be "happy" and "joyous", otherwise we are "letting the side down" or, worse, being "a downer" that drags everyone else down to our miserable level. And when we are downbeat in our mood, we tend not to spend money and buy stuff.

The same, of course, is true for Christmas. The media always cover those events such as Christmas lunches provided for the homeless, without giving any time or space to the social, class, and economic reasons for the very fact of homelessness. It's almost as though we need to talk about only those things that make us "feel good" - isn't that nice, someone made lunch for the homeless - without asking ourselves the deeper questions such as "why are there any homeless at all?".

By this stage, you may be thinking that I'm being a bit of a party-pooper myself, and that I must be the kind of curmudgeon who enjoys watching shows like "The Grumpy Person's Guide To Christmas". But that's actually my point. The contemplation of Christmas is an invitation to ponder deeper questions: questions that will undoubtedly sometimes make us uncomfortable, but which are necessary to confront if we are to find any true "meaning" in Christmas itself. It is not about being "happy" or "joyous" - or, at least, not in the superficial sense that is all surface appearance and no substantial meditation. Rather, it is joy and happiness that are themselves a form of awe - awe in the sense utilised in the Hebrew Scriptures, in which one ponders the very unfathomability of the God who is utterly other, but who nonetheless reaches out to us, inviting us into relationship. As the Psalmist in Psalm 8 declares:

When I look at your heavens, the work of your fingers,
the moon and the stars that you have established;
what are human beings that you are mindful of them,
mortals that you care for them?

It is that kind of awe - the contemplation of the unfathomable mystery of God - that the joy and "spirit" of Christmas resides. Because the God who is so comprehensively different from us as to be beyond our imagination or the capacity of language to describe, nonetheless not only engages with humanity but becomes human in the person of Jesus. Not, as is the case with Greek and other cultural myths, in order to seduce a princess or claim a great treasure - but simply in order to be human as we are human, to live as we live, and to die as we die. And, in the bargain, to tell us that God loves us, and that we ought accordingly love one another.

That, to my mind, is where true happiness resides. That, to my way of thinking, is where the "spirit of Christmas" resides. In that simple yet complex, completely unfathomable, and oft-times absurd notion that the utterly other and yet strangely relational God became human in order to not only proclaim God's love for us, but to make it real and manifest in the world. It seems to me that once we grasp that, all the rest becomes baggage and can attend to itself, leaving us free to explore the deeper questions beneath.

Combined Services For January 24

Just as we did for January this year, there will be combined services for Ringwood and Heathmont in January 2024. The schedule is as follows:

Dec 31st: Combined @HUC

Jan 7th: Combined @RUC (Communion)

Jan 14th: Combined @HUC

Jan 21st: Combined @RUC

Jan 28th: Combined @HUC

Please note that all services **start at 10am.**

Service Time For Christmas Day

Please note that the service on Christmas day will **commence at 10am.**

Notes From Congregational Meeting

For those of you who were not able to attend the congregational meeting last Sunday and thus were not able to hear Church Council's presentation regarding the future of HUC, Council have agreed to make available the information slides which accompanied the presentation. Please [click this link](#) to access the PowerPoint presentation.

Please note that the resolution of the meeting was to support the recommendation contained in the presentation.

The Christmas Bowl Appeal 2023

The Christmas Bowl Appeal is currently being run during Advent at HUC. This important Ecumenical Appeal helps many people around the world and you can help by giving to the Christmas Bowl in one of three ways.

Envelopes are available in each of the pews at church, or you can call 1800

025 101 to donate by phone, or by one of two the internet addresses. For the tech savvy, use the christmasbowl.actforpeace.org.au or the unique donation page address for Heathmont Uniting- mycb.link/75432.

Glenis McDonald, Christmas Bowl Ambassador

Library Trolley

The library trolley in the foyer has a quiet ministry going on during the year where books are donated, people buy a book for a gold coin donation and the revenue collected is sent to the Presbytery Mental Health Ministry. This year, David has sent off \$724 to the MHM made up from \$600 through the Church accounts and \$124 from the coins collected from the Library Trolley. If you have saleable books to donate to the library trolley, please place them in the tubs under the trolley and of course browse through to see if there any others you may like to donate for a gold coin.

Glenis McDonald, sorter and tidier of books

Blessings,

Brendan Byrne



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