

Blessing of Backpacks service 19 Feb 2012

Proverbs 8.1-8, 32-34

One of the major tasks we do as we grow up is learn the stories and skills of our culture. Our stories tell us about who we are as a people. Important Australian stories are part of us whether they are Mem Fox stories, or the gumnut babies and the banksia men, whether they are stories about the ANZACs, or about people like Ned Kelly or Governor Stirling. Sometimes we sing the stories like *Waltzing Matilda*. The stories are often stories of great courage in times of great danger or great hardship. They tell us that we should not take life or freedom or many of the other good things in life for granted. We learn many of these stories at school. We learn many at home. We learn stories at home about our parents and grandparents and how they lived when they were growing up. We learn who our aunts and uncles and cousins are and why we see some of them often but others we don't. We learn stories of countries we used to live in or they used to live in. My son Steve who has two small children was asking me last week what he was like as a small child and how different he might have been from his own daughter and son. These are all stories about life and how to live it. Here in church we learn yet more stories, about Adam and Eve and Noah and his family and Abraham and Sarah and Isaac and Rebekah, Jacob and Leah and Rachel, Joseph and how he brought all his family into Egypt where they prospered. We hear about Moses and how he brought the family which had now grown into thousands of people out of the slavery they had been put into in Egypt, through hardship in the desert into the promised land. The stories go on with Joshua and Hannah and Samuel and Ruth and David and Esther, and John the Baptist and Mary and Elizabeth and Jesus and Peter and Andrew and James and John and Paul. All of them tell stories about how they met God and how they lived and what they learned. Some are shameful stories to tell us what to avoid, some are inspiring.

We also learn skills - how to live with people, how to speak other languages, how to read, write, count, do arithmetic, how to use complicated tools such as i-pads and computers. We learn from teachers and from each other and from parents and from people we don't know and may never meet who wrote books or posted information on the internet.

All of this on offer to you as you begin your life. We can't make you learn - we invite you to learn. I personally love learning and I have learned that anyone can

teach me something - including you. My two year old granddaughter taught me all the names of the Wiggles last week. I would love for you to want to learn. The words that McGregor and Maia read to us about wisdom are very old words - written about 3000 years ago. The writer thinks of Wisdom as a woman who calls out in the city to everyone who passes by to learn from her how to live well by living wisely, not throwing life away in silly things but being just, and trustworthy and so finding life. Wisdom says you will have to work hard to learn. All the stories and all the skills that I have been talking about are wisdom in our culture. The more wisdom we have the better we can live. You still have to work hard.

People in countries which are poor know this really well. They know that the key to breaking out of a life which is very hard and in which you have very little is good education.

In December I saw a film called 'The First Grader' about someone going to school for the first time in Kenya, a country in Africa. The government had said that education was going to be available free for everyone. How old is a person in year one in this country? (Wait for answer). This person was a LOT older than that. He was 84 years old when he went to school for the first time. He went because he had been sent a letter by the government and he couldn't read it. When he did learn to read he found that the letter was very good news - the government wanted to give him a lot of money in compensation for things he had suffered as a young man. His story became caught people's hearts and so he was asked to go to New York to talk to the international Millennium Development Summit on the importance of free primary school education. His name was Kimani Maruge. He learned late. Everyone else at the school was the age we expect as you can see from this picture.

In your families your great grandparents did not get as good an education as you can hope to get. Many were made to leave school as early as 14 for boys, younger for girls, to work. They made sure that their children got a better education and their children got better jobs.

So today we celebrate the fact that you are going to school to learn very many of the things that you will need to live well.