

## Jesus, Vilma and planting a seed...

17/6/18

**I speak in the name of Jesus the Christ, in the power of the Holy Spirit, to the glory of God the Father.**

**Amen.**

How do we build hope for the future?

What seeds do we plant for the future?

How do we best, as the Body of Christ, plan ahead for the continuing growth of the Kingdom of God?

These are some tough questions that demand our attention and focus if we are to do justice to the Gospel for the generation of tomorrow.

I recently had the privilege and responsibility of leading a marking team in Johannesburg for the IEB (Independent Examinations Board). We were marking the national Grade Seven MATCH examinations. MATCH is an acronym for Measuring Abilities and Thinking Competencies for High School. Before the marking started, the Head Examiner presented a very interesting PowerPoint on what invaluable skills will be needed for 2020...

- 1) Complex problem solving
- 2) Critical thinking
- 3) Creativity
- 4) People management
- 5) Co-ordinating with others
- 6) Emotional intelligence
- 7) Judgement and decision making
- 8) Service orientation
- 9) Negotiation
- 10) Cognitive flexibility

This started me thinking...

What would be the top ten skills that we need to inculcate in our youth to ensure that the Kingdom of God continues to grow and expand?

We read in the Gospel of Mark this morning about the Parable of the Growing Seed. Here is a direct metaphor, from Jesus Himself, explaining how the Kingdom of God is like a seed planted in the ground.

We reap what we sow.

What are you and I planting?

We need to think ahead.

We need to think less about ourselves and more about the legacy that we leave behind for the next generation.

In 1944, Vilma Grunwald did just this...

Moments before Vilma was gassed to death by the Nazis in July 1944, she gave a guard a letter for her husband. The guard passed it onto her husband, Kurt, but for decades the couple's youngest son, Frank, was unable to read the handwritten note.

The actual letter is now on display to visitors at the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum.

The letter dated 11 July, 1954, read:

"You are my only one, dearest, in isolation we are waiting for darkness. We considered the possibility of hiding but decided not to do it since we felt it would be hopeless.

The famous trucks are already here and we are now waiting for it to begin. I am completely calm.

You – my only and dearest one, do not blame yourself for what happened, it was our destiny.

We did what we could.

Stay healthy and remember my words that time will heal – if not completely then at least partially.

Take care of the little golden boy and don't spoil him too much with your love.

Both of you – stay healthy, my dear ones. I will be thinking of you and Misa. Have a fabulous life, we must now board the trucks.

Into eternity, Vilma.”

When her son eventually read the letter as a grown man, he said, “ The letter is so positive and so giving yet also so sad but what I want them to take away from it is that there were millions of other people like my mother.”

What are the values that you and I are investing in our youth?

As a Church, what are our Top Ten essential core values for 2020?

Obviously, this is an ongoing conversation... but may I be so bold as to suggest possible Top Ten values that would open the conversation amongst us as Christians concerned about the future Kingdom of God in the World?

- 1) Grow our life of prayer
- 2) Grow our value of humility
- 3) Grow our participation in the real world in terms of give back
- 4) Be accessible and open to everyone: Think of the current debate around human sexuality
- 5) Grow our ability to evangelise and spread the Gospel
- 6) Grow our ability to maintain our finances wisely and with acumen
- 7) Grow our ability to train people for both the stipendiary and non-stipendiary ministry
- 8) Grow our ability to understand and appreciate the Bible
- 9) Grow our ability to keep Jesus Christ as the centre of our lives
- 10) Grow our ability to continue being a light of hope and love in the world, in spite of our daily struggle and suffering, like Vilma did.

I would like to sneak in an eleventh core value... we need to stay abreast of technology if we are to be relevant to the youth and upcoming generation of today. Social media platforms, Google Classrooms, networking and the like are where are youth are at. Are we?

These are just some ideas in terms of what our Core Christian values should be moving forward towards 2020. Perhaps you have your own that you feel are more important? Your input may be equally as valid. If we are to survive as a

Christian Church in a world that consistently validates atheism and consumerism, then we need to have a plan of action that is clear and mission/vision based. We cannot sit back in our pews every Sunday and expect the church to flourish and grow, like a seed planted in fertile, watered earth. We need, as Christians, to make our lives less about ourselves and more about others. More about giving back, making a difference to people's lives and facilitating positive change and growth where it is necessary. Jesus is not interested in which liturgical version we use in church, or which hymn book we use. He is, however, interested if we helped to build that house for the homeless, if we visited the sick in hospital, if we visited the aged in the old age homes, if we engaged with social and political issues.

This is Christianity in action.

This is the Church in action.

This is Jesus in action.

This is you and I in action.

This is you and I making a difference.

This is how we continue to grow the Kingdom of God, just as the seed grows in the fertile, watered ground.

My friends, Vilma found herself in an extreme situation, yet she had the temerity and courage to project, light, hope and encouragement to those who would remain behind.

How much more then should you and I be doing?

May God bless you this week ahead as you reflect upon what our Top Ten values as a Church should be.

Amen.