

Date: 24/25.12.08

Text:

Place: midweek/kingscliff/tweed heads

Title: Sorry

File: Xmas Day 08

What is the word that 2008 will be remembered for? For at this time of year newspapers always seem to think about what has happened during the year, they summarise the major events of the year and wonder aloud what legacy we will leave for future generations. So what word will 2008 best be remembered for?

Obama? Rudd? Recession? Petrol? War? Well writing recently in the SMH, Alan Ramsey in his last column before he retired suggested the word, Sorry. Remember at the start of the year, we Australians did something quite amazing, we said Sorry. We apologised for the way that successive governments, institutions, generations had mistreated our indigenous brothers and sisters. We realised that even when we had done things with good motives we had caused great pain and hurt to the first inhabitants of this land. So we said sorry and we hoped that this would be the turning point for future race relations in this country.

And the result? Well at the time, it gave the Aboriginal people great joy. Sure there are still major issues to face, but the mere fact that we had said sorry, in their eyes was a really good start. And saying sorry meant that we were not just sweeping the past under the mat, but we recognised that what was done in the past was affecting our relationship in the present. So if we had a future, then what we needed to do was to turn from our past attitude and seek to go in a different direction.

At the time Roz Lambert, Principal of the Arrawang primary school in Canberra's south west, made sure that all her students watched the speeches on Sorry Day. Then she put together an 18 page booklet that summarised many of the kid's responses to what they had just witnessed. Here are just a couple of their responses.

*"Saying sorry can fix a lot of things – Lucy."*

*"Sorry is a good thing to say. Not just at school, but everywhere – Tommy"*

*"I think it's really good that Kevin Rudd apologised, but I also wonder why it took so long for Australia to do it. I am sorry and I just can't imagine it happening – Andy"*

*"It doesn't matter when you say sorry, it only matters when you don't say sorry – Jess."*

*"Sorry is such a little word, I know though, it can make a big change – Ellen."*

Out of the mouths of babes, eh? Sorry is a good word for 2008 to be remembered for. A very good word! But should we Australians have stopped saying sorry in February? Why don't we continue the theme right until the very end of the year? Because as we come to Christmas and that wonderful time of year, as we surround ourselves with family and friends that mean so much to us, are there people around us, or maybe people who should be around us at this time, that we need to say sorry to?

Family members who are on the outer because of some incident that happened a long time ago? People who used to be our friends, but then that harsh word was said and now we

walk by on the other side of the road? Partners that we are currently arguing with? Kids that we are at present disappointed with? Parents that just don't seem to understand?

Sure the initial situation might not have been your fault, but then again it might have been as well. But days, have turned to weeks, months have turned to years and our attitude to them, our coldness, our hardness, our own sense of vengeance, of justice has meant that we have not been able to forgive them for what they have done. So we have pushed them away and now it might be our turn to say sorry, for we haven't been blameless in the way that we have related to them.

Relationships are always complex and as the old saying goes, *"it does take two to tango"*. So maybe we could think about saying sorry, reaching out the hand of friendship and reconciliation and seeking to bring someone back into the fold. For as Lucy said, *"Sorry can fix a lot of things"* and as Tommy has reminded us, *"Sorry is a good thing to say, not just at school but everywhere"*.

But while we are thinking about saying sorry, maybe there is one more direction we need to take this and that is upwards. Maybe, just maybe we need to say Sorry to God. And wouldn't Christmas time be the perfect time to so?

For at Christmas time, we are reminded that God has reached out to us in the form of his son, Jesus. That this little baby was a reminder of Immanuel, that God can really be with us. That his name, Jesus, means that God saves. He wants to save us from our sins. And that his second name Christ, means a Messiah, a King, someone who has come to rule us. To lead us in such a way that we follow Him, as our Good Shepherd, all the way throughout our lives.

God has taken the initiative. He knows that our relationship with Him has been fractured. He is aware that most of us enjoy the created things more than the creator of all things. He can see that some of the people in this world are defiant, that they don't want to have anything to do with God. But that most of us just get caught up with other things, with our jobs, with our families, with our pleasure that we push him to the edges of our lives and then he just drops off the radar. We don't out and out reject him, we just forget about him.

That's why Christmas is so important. It's an annual reminder that God cares. God is not some distant deity barking orders from afar. He is not some old Father Time figure, who has lost control over the world around him. No he rolls up his sleeves, he gets his hands dirty. He comes to this world in the form of a baby boy. He grows up and teaches us about the sort of life that God is pleased with. And then he is willing to put his money where his mouth is and so in order to bring us back to Himself, he sends his one and only Son to die on the cross and pay the penalty for our sins. And on the third day, he rises to life, to show us that he is stronger than everything else in the universe, even death itself.

God has done that for you. God has done that for me. So isn't it time that we played our part and said Sorry? Sorry God that I have forgotten about you. Sorry God that I haven't trusted in Jesus. Sorry God that when you should have been the most important thing in my life, I have put my own wants ahead of your will, my own dreams instead of your plans, my own desires before your word, my own fun as more important than your people.

Now saying sorry won't solve all our issues with God, but is the right place to start. It means we are not sweeping our past under the mat but we recognised that what was done in the past was affecting our relationship in the present. So if we had a future with God then what we needed to do was turn from our past attitude and seek to go in a different direction.

A different direction, where Jesus is at the centre of what we do, not just on the edges. Where we now listen to God's word. And that is why we have given you this gift today, to help you daily put your life in perspective by reading from God's word. And where we reach out to him in prayer and where we come to Church and become part of God's community in this place.

Sorry . Why has it taken us so long to say sorry to God? For saying sorry is like unlocking the door to joy! It reminds us that all that we have is a real blessing from God. It reconnects us to the one who made you for a purpose. It opens us up to the fruits of the Spirit – love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self control. And it is Gods way of getting rid of your sin and of restoring you to again to being His friends, with all that this entails.

In Ellen's words, *"Sorry is such a little word, I know though, it can make a big change."* So let sorry be the word of 2008. At the start of the year we have said sorry to our indigenous brothers and sisters. But at the end of the year can we say sorry to those around us where our relationships with them have become strained. And at the high point of the year, here in the middle of the Christmas period, can we say sorry to our God.

For today he has offered us a present, the most valuable present that we will ever receive. It is the gift of a relationship with Himself, of forgiveness for our sins, of eternal life, or a life of purpose, of hope, of faith, of love, of real joy. And the only way of accepting that gift, is to say sorry to God. If we can't do that, then the gift remains there under the tree. If we can accept it with repentance and faith then it changes everything.

Or as Jess would put it, *"It doesn't matter when you say sorry. It only matters when you don't say sorry."* Wouldn't it be a shame to miss the opportunity that God is giving us right now? Why don't we say "Sorry" together in prayer.