

Merchiston Assembly - Tuesday 6 May 2008

Ten days ago we had a married couple from Singapore staying with us. They had left their three children at home in Singapore. We were just starting breakfast when Vera's mobile phone rang. This was the youngest of their children phoning from Singapore to say that she was refusing to go to school.

Mother burst into tears, so I tried to tell them a story about another mother with the same problem. This again happened at breakfast on the day the new term was due to begin.

"I'm not going back to school today, Mother. The pressures are so great I just can't take it any more.

"But you've got to go to school," says mother.

"Well give me two good reasons," replied her son.

"Well first you're aged forty-two and second you're the Headmaster."

I had 16 years as a Head with all sorts of pressures but even on the bad days I believed passionately in what we are aiming to do in the best schools and Merchiston has always been top of my list.

Now, of course, it is a very different school from the one I attended sixty years ago, but the foundations are still much the same. I shared with you in an earlier assembly Sir James Cobban's 4 foundation stones....the 4x Fs: FAITH, FAMILY, FRIENDS AND FITNESS of mind and body.

Today I want to add **FOCUS**.

Now, as I look out from this platform and see some 400 of you, I know from experience that each of you is unique – you have particular talents, particular strengths and weaknesses, particular needs. The school exists to help you to find and develop your talents and to use them for the benefit of all.

So to the 5th Foundation Stone.....**FOCUS**.

C.H. Evans was Headmaster here when I was a boy and he had one particular piece of advice for us and I know it's one that Mr Hunter stresses also. It's based on a verse from St Luke's Gospel.

MUCH IS EXPECTED OF THOSE TO WHOM MUCH IS GIVEN.

We're all privileged here and that's why the education is fairly intensive. You don't waste time and much is expected of you.

As H.G. Wells once wrote: "The future of civilization is a race between education and catastrophe," and everyone here is involved in that race... Make the most of your days here, focus on what is important. You face a much greater challenge than we did 60 years ago.

I finish with a brief word on **WHAT IS IMPORTANT**....

True education is about getting to know yourself, focusing on what you are best able to contribute and developing these talents for the good of the wider community.

That is what a school like Merchiston helps you to do.

FAITH

As part of that search, I would commend to you once again the first of the five Fs FAITH.

When I was a boy here at Merchiston, the Headmaster, Mr Evans, sent for me and accused me of worshipping rugby. Now he may have been right at the time but at the end of the day what I valued most from my days at Merchiston was a strong Christian faith which has sustained me through a long and enjoyable life.

For me it is Christ or nothing and I would not like to through life worshipping NOTHING.

It's been good to attend the 2 Confirmation Services and to see so many of you confirming your faith. I hope many more of you will do so in the future.

Bill Donaldson
6 May 2008