

## St Jude's Book Launch

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It is of course a privilege to be invited to launch this excellent book, the history of St Jude's 1866-2016, entitled 'People of the Risen King'.

I must admit to being a biased enthusiast for this book. I am addicted to history, especially church history; I regard my participation in St Jude's as one of the greatest privileges of my life; and I am a friend and admirer of Elizabeth Willis, the author!

I enjoyed the great strengths of the book. It is clearly the product of a trained and judicious historian. It is based on careful and meticulous research, despite the occasional paucity of available resources. It is sympathetic to its subject, but it is history, not hagiography. Warts are not ignored, particularly Vicars' warts!

Most of all, it places St Jude's church in its community, social, and cultural context, a crucial backdrop to the life of the church, an every-changing context which has had such a massive impact on the life of the church in every generation.

The Greek writer Xenophon, no doubt a remote ancestor of our Senator, wrote that, 'A question is an education.' That is, once we ask a question, we are ready to learn.

So here are four questions for you to ponder as you read this book.

1. **How did St Jude's look in the light of the history of God's people in the Bible?** For the Bible tells us how to evaluate God's people from God's perspective, as it tells us how to evaluate human history from God's perspective. Does the church love God? Does the church love its neighbours? Does the church trust and obey God's words? Does the church honour and worship Jesus as Saviour and Lord? Does the church show the fruit of the Spirit? Does the church pray? Does the church witness to Christ? Does the church do good works? Does the church engage in world mission? Does the church offer itself as a living sacrifice to God?
2. **How did the church adapt to its ever-changing environment?** Mr Darwin informed us that one of the keys to understand our world is 'the survival of the fittest', which means, in part at least, the fittest to **adapt**. You may observe that fitness to adapt to a changing environment has been one of the constant challenges for this church. And I have no doubt that the cultural changes of the last 150 years are nothing compared to the tsunami of cultural change which we are about to face.

3. **Has St Jude's always functioned as a people of the Risen King, or has it sometimes lapsed into being a Christian club?** I ask the question, because it is perfectly possible to have a church which functions apparently very successfully: holding interesting services, attracting lots of people, maintaining its buildings and grounds, meeting its budgets, running lots of activities, and attracting great loyalty, and yet which is functioning, in practice, as if God does not exist, God has not spoken, Christ did not come to save us, there is no Holy Spirit, no need to trust in Christ, no need to pray, no need to grow in godliness, no need to do evangelism, and no need to engage in world mission. Church or club? I must tell you that this was the question which kept me awake at night when I was Vicar of St Jude's, and I constantly prayed that this would not happen! A good question to ask as you evaluate a church.
4. **What was the invisible history of St Jude's?** We human beings are not omniscient, and so cannot write omniscient history. God's eternal ways are passed our finding out, unless he has revealed them to us. We do not know of the private prayer lives of members of St Jude's, and yet no doubt it was our prayer warriors who carried the main burden of our life and ministry. We do not know of the sacrifices or the sins of the members of St Jude's, and yet surely God honoured their sacrifices as surely as he judged their sins. Perhaps all of the most important people in the history of St Jude's in God's eyes are not mentioned in the book. There is a wonderful saying, wrongly attributed to Albert Einstein: 'Not everything that can be counted counts, and not everything that counts can be counted.' And what we humans can record is not even half of the complete story. That is known only to God. I remember meeting an elderly Mrs Gray of 29 Palmerston Place when I arrived at St Jude's. She had been converted in the time of Lance Shilton, and became a faithful member of the church. Her husband I think had not been converted, and she was not able to come to church. Her name is not in this book, though her name is certainly written in the Lamb's 'book of life'. Praise God!

You will love the stories of people renting their pews, of Vicars being bashed, of parishioners being chased in the streets, of support for ministry among the Chinese living in Melbourne, of notable service to the poor and needy, of evangelism among Italians, nurses, and university students, of missionaries sent to China and Northern Australia, and of Fanny Ellis' sixty years of teaching in the Sunday School!

**The thing which struck me the most when I read the book was that it St Jude's has always had very ordinary people!** We have been people of our extraordinary Risen King, but we have always been ordinary people of our extraordinary Risen King! As I read the book I was reminded of Paul's words in 1 Corinthians:

*Brothers and sisters, think of what you were when you were called. Not many of you were wise by human standards; not many were influential; not many were of noble birth. But God chose the foolish things of the world to shame the wise; God chose the weak things of the*

*world to shame the strong. God chose the lowly things of this world and the despised things—and the things that are not—to nullify the things that are.*

For Paul, Christ's people echo and demonstrate God's power and wisdom shown in Christ crucified. And the reason:

*This is so that no one may boast before him. It is because of him that you are in Christ Jesus, who has become for us wisdom from God—that is, our righteousness, holiness and redemption. Therefore, as it is written: "Let the one who boasts boast in the Lord" [1 Corinthians 26-31].*

**Many histories of churches are written when the church has closed down.** I read one recently, of St Nathaniel's in Liverpool England, opened in 1868, burned down and then rebuilt in 1901, and finally demolished in 1993, having been derelict for some years. Its first 40 years were years of remarkable ministry in the Victorian slums of Liverpool. Its first Vicar described the parish as 'sixteen acres of sin', and there were 5 people at its first service, held in a cellar. The church is no more. And we in Australia see redundant churches turned into pancake parlours, or funeral directors', or edgy homes. I often feel sad when I see them: it feels as if all their ministry has been wasted. But that of course is not true.

For God is such a good house-keeper, that nothing is wasted in his economy.

No prayer is wasted, because we read in Revelation 8 that the prayers of the saints ascend to God.

No good work is wasted, no praise of God is wasted, and no gift to God is wasted, because we read in Revelation "Worthy is the Lamb, who was slain, to receive power and wealth and wisdom and strength and honour and glory and praise!"

And no prayer or good work is wasted, because they are all 'perfumed by the sacrifice of Christ' [John Calvin].

God does not waste human lives!

In our society, there are there characteristic features of a launch:

A speech, champagne, and a prayer, such as 'God bless all who sail in her'.

I have given a speech, I have drunk some champagne, and I would like to pray for this book, and for St Jude's'.

**Let us pray for this book.**

We thank you for Elizabeth's labour of love in writing this book, and ask that you would receive it by your grace. Please use it to bring honour and glory to you, to encourage those who read it to serve and honour you, and to challenge many to 'live dangerously, love lavishly, and serve humbly,' for Jesus' sake, Amen.

**Let us pray for St Jude's.**

Gracious God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit: we thank and praise you for the life of this church over more than 150 years. We praise you for all your saints, for all their lives and ministries, for the worship and service of you in their daily lives, for their prayers, their gifts, their good works, and their common life. We thank you for all who have been converted, matured and trained in godliness and good ministry. And we praise you that you have always been our faithful and loving heavenly God and Saviour. We pray that we would follow the good examples of those who have gone before us.

And, in the words of the Collect for St Jude's Day, prayed for so many years on this day in this church:

*O Almighty God, who hast built thy Church upon the foundation of the Apostles and Prophets, Jesus Christ himself being the head corner-stone: Grant us so to be joined together in unity of spirit by their doctrine, that we may be made an holy temple acceptable unto thee; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.*