

REFLECTION:

SUBWAY STRADIVARIUS

On 12 January, 2007, Joshua Bell laid out his violin case in a Washington subway and started playing. Three nights before he played in front of the Boston Philharmonic to gushing audiences who gladly payed hundreds of dollars to listen. Bell played the same music – Bach. He played the same violin – an original Stradivarius violin (priceless really, but purchased for \$3.5M). Bell is a US virtuoso and classical music “pin up” boy. No one plays better.

So what happened in the subway? A totally awesome sound reverberated through the ordinary public walls of a railway thoroughfare as over a thousand people walked by. What happened? It would seem very little! Some stopped momentarily and walked on. Most did not even falter. Children were the most likely to be stilled, only to be hurried on by parents. Placed in a concert hall wearing a suit with expensive tickets, the experience is framed for us and declares: ‘this is going to be awesome’. But in a different context and without the framing, a thousand people hurried by.

How does this happen? How do we become better listeners, more open and quick to give our full attention? What is it that really drives one foot so robotically in front of the other?

Last week, a boy from year one spoke to me after chapel. His eyes were full of tears as he tried to describe what was happening in Pakistan. I had nothing to say that would ‘fix’ his anguish. But I could not walk on by.

Riding home on Thursday, a rainbow fell less than a hundred metres away on the waters of Lake Ginninderra. Its reflection brought the rainbow to within metres of me. I could not ride by.

A text message on my phone I just discovered this morning. (I was out late at the Rugby Dinner last night). It is from my son “Hi Dad. Are you nealy fineshed because I am waiting for a kiss good night.”

The world we live in is where we must look for the wonder and the beauty. It is within our own lives that sufficient reason exists to stop and simply delight in what is present. I love Charles Taylor’s line “life is about communion across distances.” If we are not awake, not attentive and open, even expectant, then communion will pass us by and the ‘distances’ fall away into a void.

And if we need a frame, a cue to recognise the soil and time and company we keep is precious, then listen to the story of God: there is intent to creation, love in its origin and its end. The whole of creation is good and within every person there resides the image and likeness of the Creator. This world, this earth, this humanity, is the subject of God's creative and redemptive love. Gerard Manly Hopkins writes it so well:

God's Grandeur (1918)

*The world is charged with the grandeur of God.
It will flame out, like shining from shook foil;
It gathers to a greatness, like the ooze of oil
Crushed. Why do men then now not reckon his rod?
Generations have trod, have trod, have trod;
And all is seared with trade;
Bleared, smeared with toil;
And wears man's smudge and shares man's smell: the soil
Is bare now, nor can foot feel, being shod.*

*And for all this, nature is never spent;
There lives the dearest freshness deep down things;
And though the last lights off the black West went
Oh, morning, at the brown brink eastward, springs —
Because the Holy Ghost over the bent
World broods with warm breast and with ah! bright wings.*

RAS

Students who participated in the 40Hr Famine need to return their books and money.