

St Andrew's Presbyterian Church Penrith

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ENCOURAGEMENT LETTER – 26FEB25

Dear brothers and sister in Christ,

How are you today? I am thankful for spending time with students and staff on the Christ College retreat. I am thankful for the men and women who are being trained to serve in churches as pastors and other ministry workers. I am thankful for the lecturers who are training them.

Today we divert from considering the Congregation Snapshot as I give a response to the graffiti that was scrawled on the church before moving on to church matters, plus a little challenge for those with a keen eye.

ENCOURAGEMENT: A Response to the Graffiti on the Church

On the weekend, a local artist and vandal put graffiti on the front of the church building – a swastika on the brickwork and on the glass the words, “God is why we R at war”. I am sure many of us on hearing about this have responded differently, and I want to give my thoughts about the graffiti.

First, the graffiti is a symptom of the friction we experience living in the world as those who belong to God and his kingdom. The Bible expects such things to happen. We might think of when Jesus says:

“Blessed are you when people insult you, persecute you and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of me. Rejoice and be glad, because great is your reward in heaven, for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you.”

Matthew 5:11-12

Or when he says,

“Remember what I told you: ‘A servant is not greater than his master.’ If they persecuted me, they will persecute you also. If they obeyed my teaching, they will obey yours also.”

John 15:20

Now a little bit of paint on bricks and glass is hardly high-level persecution. It did not take long to remove it from the building. But neither should we dismiss it out of hand. It shows at least one person is struggling with God enough to scrawl a message on the church, pointing the blame at him and his people.

Second, the graffiti should not cause us to be afraid, but rather prompt us towards love, as Jesus says,

Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, pray for those who mistreat you.

Luke 6:27

Part of the reason we exist as a church is to love those around us, including this person who wrote on the wall. Since we do not know who it is, at the very least we should pray for them and pray that God might bless them with the knowledge of his Son. And if this person were to walk

through our doors, we should welcome them with open arms, readily showing grace and help them to understand who God is.

Third, the graffiti shows that the person has a deep concern for what is happening in the world and misdiagnoses the problem. They are representative of people in our community who worry about current world events and is looking for something or someone to blame. It shows a misunderstanding for what God's involvement in the war is, but at the same time sees that there is some kind of answer with God. In their fear, they respond with destroying property. We live in a world that is afraid and increasingly worried, we must stand upon the foundation we have in Christ and respond to the world in love, declaring the good news of Jesus.

Fourthly, I would like to sit down with the person and explain to them who God is. I would show them how the seeds of war are in the sinful hearts of men and women, and the violence we see in the nations emerges from the hatred of people to one another. I would point out to them that they too are a sinner and need the saving grace that God gives to us in his Son. I would encourage them to turn from their sin and to put their faith in Christ, the one who gives us peace with God and peace with one another (Ephesians 2:14-17).

Let us together respond from a position of faith and love – seeking to love those who have damaged our property and stand confidently in our faith that we belong to God and we are in his hands.

FINAL COMMENTS

As always, love and prayers, Steve