

Talk for the Children: Ben's Story

It was 8 o'clock in morning and Ben was just coming into the kitchen to get his breakfast when he heard his Mum's cell phone go "ding". "You've got a message on your phone", Mum", he called out to his mother. Mum came racing in from putting the washing into the machine and picked up her phone. "Oh goodness me," she said. "There won't be any school for you today, Ben. There's been a fire at your school in the night and the fire brigade is there now. You might have to spend the day with Nan. I'll just give her a call." So Mum called Nan and soon Ben was being dropped off at Nan's house with his lunchbox and his reading books and a jigsaw puzzle. Nan really liked jigsaws and Ben did too.

Ben had a great day with Nan, but he couldn't help thinking about the fire at his school. "Who would be mean enough", he wondered, "to set fire to their school? Would his picture of the butterfly habitat that Mrs McKinlay, his teacher had said was specially good be all burnt up? What about the sports equipment? And the guitars? Would they have to go to another school?" Ben really liked his school and he was very worried about what might have happened, and most of all why someone could be so mean as to damage his school. Tautahi school was really special. All the kids loved it. They were really proud to be Tautahi kids. Why would anyone want to do this?"

Ben asked his Dad why someone would set fire to his school. Dad wasn't sure, but he told Ben that it was ok to be angry that his school had been damaged. "Sometimes", Dad said, "People do hurtful things because they have a big problem in their lives and they want to lash out. We really ought to feel sorry for them – but sometimes that's quite hard." "I hope someone can help them so they don't do it again", said Ben. "This is horrible".

Later in the day Mum got a text from the school. It said that it was ok for Ben to come to school tomorrow, that the fire had been confined to the library and thankfully none of the classrooms had been damaged. Ben was very glad that he could go to school the next day, but he was sad about the library. He loved reading and Tautahi School had a great library.

When Ben and his friends arrived at school the next day, the area round the library was surrounded by cones and plastic tape. No-one was allowed in. Mrs McKinlay told the children that the room that the library was in would be able to be repaired but that all the books had either been burnt or were damaged by smoke or by the foam that the fire department used to put out the fire. The children were really sad but Mrs McKinlay said, "Don't be sad! It would be so much worse if it had been our classroom that burnt. And sometimes something good can come out of something bad. Let's wait and see."

Ben went home that night and told Mum and Dad about the damage the fire had done. "I won't be able to borrow books from the library now", he said sadly. Then Mum had an idea. "What about we have a look in your bookcase and see if there are any books that you have read already that some other children might like to read? Not horrible ones covered in Marmite and with turned up corners, but ones that are still good but that you don't need anymore." So Mum and Ben had a look and they found a pile of books that Mum put in a bag with a label, "For the new library".

Next morning when they got to school Mum and Ben took the books to the office. And do you know what they found? The office was full of books! Lots of other families had had the same idea. But also there were Grandmas who had some books for their grandchildren who had dropped off books. There were kids who used to go to Tautahi School and now were at secondary school and they had brought books. There were even people who had heard about the fire and had gone out and bought a book for the school. In the week after the fire more and more books came to Tautahi School from people and businesses and authors and all sorts of people who thought the children at Tautahi School needed a library.

The librarian got very busy putting stickers in all the books and for a while the library had to be in the classrooms but very soon Ben and his friends had plenty of books to read. "It's amazing, Mum", he said. "I was so sad after the fire that we had lost our library but Mrs McKinlay said we should just wait because sometimes something good can come out of something bad – and it did. It's like a miracle, Mum".

"Yes, it is", said Mum. "The miracle", said Dad, "is all the people in our community who cared enough about our children to bring them new books."

"That's what Jesus taught us", said Ben, "- to care about people especially when they have a hard time."

"Yes, it is", said Dad. "I think Jesus would be very happy about the miracle at Tautahi School library."