

## **Gail's Spiritual Journey**

The phone rings – ‘Hi Gail, Paul here.’ General talk. Then: ‘I’d like to ask you something’. Ok. ‘How would you like to do a talk on your Christian journey?’ Pause. Me thinking – ‘Oh no, not me, what to say?’. Longer pause, and then I’m saying okay.

Get off the phone, and have been thinking ever since! Funny about that.

This is only the second time I’ve stood here to talk. The first was nearly 5 years ago, me as a daughter with my sister and daughter, giving a eulogy about my lovely mum, and now as a child of God about myself – so much harder – but here goes.

I was ecumenically conceived of an ex-communicated Roman Catholic dad and a Church of England mum! Dad was ex-communicated because they were not married in the Roman Catholic Church and they wouldn’t agree to any offspring being raised as Catholics as 3 days after their marriage, Dad was heading off to the Middle East to fight for his country, and should he not return, they couldn’t see any point in a child being not Mum’s religion. Needless to say, Dad did return and was always supportive of our being baptised, our going to Sunday school and subsequently an Anglican girls’ school.

Mum and dad weren’t regular church goers but we were read Bible stories, said our prayers nightly, and they were always at monthly family services, dad loving the C of E hymns, saying the Catholic ones were dreary!

School of course had morning assemblies and I was a member of the school choir. I loved the words of the services in the Book of Common Prayer and anthems set to music. I strongly resisted, a decision made even before we got there, making a commitment to Jesus at a Billy Graham extravaganza at the Sydney Showgrounds where I estimate half there, made their pledge! Would love to know where they’re at now!

All this time of course, general divinity classes were held, I was confirmed (because I was 13 and it was the “right age), learnt all those words by rote, wore the white dress and veil, and a bit like a debutante, was on my way!

But now in my time of reflection, something must have stuck in my heart!

Moving along, married Jim, product of a strong Christian union, had 3 children and during these years, Church occasionally but always at Christmas and Easter. Then in about 1984 Meagan was staying with a friend overnight and on the Sunday morning, attended St Lukes, North Brighton, where the children acted out the Gospel. Of course, the following Sunday we had to go and watch, and here we are today.

The priests of each of the churches we have attended have offered their own words and actions that have particularly stuck with me.

Fr. Leslie Bond once said that when difficult or hard things confront us, and we say “Why me”, turn the question around and say “why not me, I have my God to see me through.” When my dad admitted to alcohol controlling his life, and as a mid 20 year old I shouted why should I have a dad who is an alcoholic, I called on God to sustain him (and us, his family), and finally dad found sobriety in a relatively short time. Always when I have called in despair, I have been upheld.

Fr Roger Featherstone challenged all who love, to have the courage to climb to the top of the wall and over, held safely in God’s love.

Fr. Chris introduced me to the words of the Celtic Church and I love the earthiness of the words they used. Maybe this is why I always feel very close to God in the ruggedness of mountains and coastlines, and in the quietness of our land.

Fr Ian tested me with his emphasis on quietness and stillness, something I’m not good at as I love words and song, but his introduction to us of Julian of Norwich really struck something in me. We were fortunate to attend a Eucharist in the Lady Julian cell at St Julian’s in Norwich which was very special.

I’d like to quote from a little book, enfolded in love, daily readings with Julian of Norwich. *The Lady Julian: The Plaque*

Dame Julian was called to serve God in the solitary life. From her anchor-hold on the site of this chapel she encircled the world by her writings. Her book 'The Revelations of Divine Love' sets out the meaning of the visions she had received on 8 May 1373. From the window of her cell, too, she gave counsel and comfort to the burdened and perplexed. In this holy place we can almost hear her saying, '*God said not "Thou shalt not be tempested, thou shalt not be afflicted, "but "Thou shalt not be overcome."*'

Another of her beautiful sayings is, '*Our falling hindereth Him not to love us.*' She had found that truly the key to all religious experience is this, '*Love was His meaning.*' '*I saw full clearly that 'ere God made us He loved us; which love was never slacked, nor ever shall be. And in this Love our life is everlasting.*'

Julian's fourteenth-century world was as marked by aggression, insecurity and change as is ours today. Her most famous words--born of intense personal suffering--"all shall be well, and all manner of thing shall be well"--are as much needed and as true now as when she wrote them.

*Go on your way rejoicing, 'live gladly and gally because of His love.'*

She was certainly in no doubt that ours is a loving God.

Fr Paul’s invitation (Gail I have something to ask you, help), to be a Communion Minister made me think seriously about my role in the church and as Linda said last week, the donning of the white gown, seems to take one right into communion with God

in serving him. The Easter journey as we have done for the last 2 years has provided a very deepening of my faith.

My faith is very simple – I just believe in a loving God and know that after this life, as promised, I will be reunited with him. I don't seem to need to have proof of this being, I don't seem to need to be forever reading to have questions answered. Maybe I should, I don't know.

I know and believe He gave His Son for the forgiveness of my sins – the ultimate sacrifice – and I give thanks daily as I ask forgiveness for the things I have and haven't done.

On trying to analyse why I simply believe, it seems that with me, I only need to know that something "is", not all the ins and outs of how and why.

Am I missing something? Maybe as a Christian I Am a lot like I was as a schoolgirl with school reports that often said, "Fair, Gail could do better".

I try to do better in what I do in my life with family, church, friends, and the community we live in, and thank God daily for his directing us to this part of the world where it seems easier to do this.

The magnificent words of the Gloria which we say most Sundays of the year, express in words I would never be able to put together, my understanding of what it is about.

Glory to God in the highest, and peace to God's people on earth,  
Lord God, heavenly king, almighty God and Father.  
We worship you, we give you thanks, we praise you for your glory.  
Lord Jesus Christ, only son of the Father,  
Lord God, Lamb of God, you take away the sins of the world,  
Have mercy on us.  
You are seated at the right hand of the Father,  
Receive our prayer.  
For you alone are the holy one, you alone are the Lord,  
You alone are the most high, Jesus Christ with the Holy Spirit.  
In the glory of the God the Father. Amen