

## Who is making me?

This is a line from a poem called Corniche, by Les Murray.

*I adore the Creator because I made myself.*

When Paul asked me to do this talk, I said to him "Yep. I'm tickled pink". When I got off the phone I realised I had been pleased to accept because I would be elevated among people here. It was all about me.

There's a photo of me at age 2, wearing my Dad's stethoscope. Even at two, I was framed as someone who would have status. The photo was trotted out at my 21st, and all my medical student friends were impressed by the apparent prophecy that I would become a doctor.

To back-track a little, I was baptised when I was a baby. When I was little, my grandmother did some nasty things to me. I was out of my body by age 5; depressed by age 12; my first severe extended depression came when I was 17. I did 4 years of medical school but bipolar disorder took me out of that for good.

Now, I was very disappointed for decades about having to quit medicine. But I heard that the words doctor, teacher and rabbi come from the same root. They all conferred status – just call me Status-Girl.

If I could not be a doctor, I would be a rabbi or a teacher. I have become a teacher, of education for people with bipolar, and that's something I love doing and building. I am studying theology, but I don't think I'm on the way to becoming a priest – or a rabbi. Even so, I liked this stole so much I bought it. In any case, you can see the common thread.

For about 20 years my bipolar disorder wouldn't let reality stand still for more than an afternoon. Everything kept shifting. In Church I heard only humiliation, shaming and rule-making, and so I stayed away.

I knew God was there during those years, but with my brain broken there was nothing I could do in response to him. Couldn't go to church, couldn't read,

couldn't pray. But the Ground of Being held me, whether sick or well, for 20 plus years. In that time, I kept open to reading new stuff, on and off.

I read Matthew Fox, Darryl Reaney, Rupert Sheldrake, John Shelby Spong. These guys stretched me in new and imaginative ways.

In 2000, I had a baby, remarried, and my book was published. A published author! Status-Girl is Back! How much clobber is still not enough!

To bring us up to date, a couple of years ago I needed a reason to get out of the house for a while each week. I did my homework first, though, and made sure it was not likely to be a church where you checked your brains in at the porch before coming inside.

### ***What I do – my own Christian practice***

At home, I have a prayer time (that I keep about 50% of the time). I can't pray when my brain is broken. I don't read the Bible every day. I do try to come to church every week. I find the lapping of Sunday onto Sunday deeply reassuring.

All these routines have something in it for me: the routines help me stay well with bipolar disorder.

In fact, a lot of what I do is driven by staying well with bipolar disorder. One of these is to make sure I'm always busy enough, have enough stimulus, to keep the depression at bay. Consequently I am not a human being. I am a human doing.

Occasionally I slow down enough to remember Psalm 46: Be still and know that I am God. Be still and know that I am the Ground of Being.

There's one other thing. It's something my Dad taught me by example: you make a friend of the priest. Because of the work I do here, I'm in frequent contact with Paul, so that not only does friendship develop, also it's easier to ask a question, and I am able to watch and learn from him.

### ***So that's what I do. What does God do with me?***

Get both swags. Ask child to help. I carry these swags with me all the time. God helps me with them.

## **Get red swag**

It's light. I think – yes, it's full of balloons. What do you put into the balloon when you blow it up?

Yes, you blow air in. Would you say your breath goes in? Now someone told me that the word for 'breath' is the same as the word for 'Holy Spirit' in the bible. So these balloons, they might be filled with the holy spirit! Let's see.

## **1 Prayer and healing**

One recent instance was when I was praying, driving through the hills along the Maroondah, out on the way to Yarck. I usually just listen to God or silently praise him. At that time, I was having trouble with dark feelings every week in church, that stopped me from being a server. No sooner than I had formed the question "What am I going to do about this?" in my mind, the wordless answer came back instantly like an echo from the hills. Translated into words, the answer was "Don't worry. Sit with it. It's going to be alright." I said out loud to my car: Oh. Okay. Alright.

Nothing happened for a few weeks. I kept coming to church. Then a misunderstanding led to my telling someone here clearly where my boundaries lay. From then on I have had no problems with being in church – no more grandmother problems!

## **2 Forgiveness**

God has also given me a great capacity: to forgive.

There were two people, and I loved them equally. Person One was making things so difficult for Person Two, that I had to send Person Two away for their safety.

I was really cross about this, because I missed Person Two.

After two years, I was still cross towards Person One. I was at the clothesline, pegging out clothes on a showery day, feeling these dark emotions as I worked. Without any warning, I went from 'not having forgiven' to 'having *already* forgiven,' in an instant. Past tense. There was no sense in which I made a decision. In fact, it felt as if the forgiveness had come into me from behind. I remember turning around to see what was there!

### **3 Loving enemies**

God has also given me the ability to love those who are acting like enemies. Now, Jesus pointed out it was a no-brainer to love your friends. It's easy as. But it's really hard to love someone who is harshly and unfairly criticising you day after day, and it's really hard to love a bully who has rounded up a witch hunt against you.

It's difficult, but it is possible, to love people who are behaving like enemies.

### **4 Creativity**

This is the one I enjoy the most. This is the area where I do most of my work in the parish. Some examples:

- I got really enthused about a board game for the Zaccheus story.
- The puppet show on Easter Day, with its own soundtrack.
- Adapting the song 'Hallelujah' to suit our message for the Children's Service is another example.
- And just wait till you see the treasure hunt on the website!

These are examples of my main motivation as a Christian at the moment – telling the good news, and demonstrating my confidence in God through creativity.

Creativity does come with the bipolar territory, but copying God as a creator is also an awesome way of praising him. Think of Michelangelo, Beethoven, Les Murray, Status-Girl!

### **Get white swag.**

#### **1 Chains.**

Well, these chains keep me stuck in the world. One thing God and I are working on at the moment is my enchantment with the landscape I live in. How can I drop my fishing nets if I'm chained to the Strathbogie Tableland?

## **2 Thorns.**

Ouch! Check these out. I sometimes think I'm like these branches, hurting people without even meaning to. Some of the prickles represent the irritability of bipolar disorder. We'll leave them where they are for God to work on.

## **3 Coat hangers**

Coat hangers remind me of question marks. Coat hangers are all the questions that I have of God. Look at them all! For example:

- Why do we have so little, and so belittling, evidence of the role of women in your reign? Why are the two Marys written out of the Easter morning liturgy? It's the climax of the story! (1)
- How does Jesus' death and resurrection produce our redemption to God and our salvation – and this is the very core of our faith! (2)

Luckily, Dietrich Bonhoeffer had something to say about this, that lets me off the worry hook. He said that the legitimate questions were "Who is Jesus Christ" and "What is the work of Christ". But questions that asked "*How* does Jesus Christ achieve for us what he does" are impertinent questions that may not be asked. Phew! It's just gotta go on the pile.

- Another one is that I just don't get Jesus. (3)

Many women don't get Jesus just because he is male. Others, like me, don't get Jesus because seems to be a difficult person, disdainful, haughty, probably wore a beard, on top of being a male Jew from the other side of the world 2000 years ago. Give that one back to God.

But for all the coat hangers in that pile, I am confident that God loves me, holds me, even with all those fundamental questions, even with bipolar disorder, even over 20 years away.

## **Summary**

So I'm represented by both these two swags. You can't say this one or that one is the 'real' me. The red swag contains gifts of the spirit. It's light and easy to carry and that's for me to work with. That other heavy pile of junk is for God to work on.

### ***Tying it all together***

So what ties all this together? You know my human motivation. What is my *Christian* motivation? It's this. This unfathomable Jesus, this awesome Ground of Being, is so liberating that I just want to share my confidence in him with everyone.

And so back to Les Murray's observation. Who is making me? I am making myself, with or without God's help; AND God is making me with or without my help.

Thank you for listening. May your own Gifts prosper and your coat hangers straighten out to become the exclamation marks of your faith.