



12 February 2022

Life in Abundance (John 10.10b)

© Susanna Pain

Some of you have heard of my affair with butterflies. It began after I had been at a quiet retreat at a convent in Archibald Street in Lyneham, not far from here, many many years ago. I decided to buy some butterfly jewellery from Beaver Gallery to symbolise my leaving home, treading lightly on the earth.

Years later, when I was ordained Deacon in the Anglican Church, in 1989, some dear friends made me a butterfly stole embroidering a stunning Ulysses butterfly on the ends. It has recently been repaired by Kate Campbell. Ulysses butterflies- symbol of the traveller, the Pilgrim; and the butterfly- a symbol of resurrection, new life.

Years later again, in 2000, I was preaching at the midnight service at St James King Street in Sydney when a huge orange Orchard Swallowtail butterfly fluttered around the church, at midnight in the middle of Sydney in the middle of the church, during my sermon. I stopped what I was saying and looked, and said, 'What is that butterfly doing here? Butterfly is an Easter symbol, not Christmas'. Then I went on with my sermon. A week later I spoke of butterflies in my sermon, then on 5 January, the eve of the feast of the Epiphany, I had a phone call from the one who was to become my beloved and my husband. I said, 'I'm just looking for my butterfly sermon to send to mum', and he said, 'Have I told you my butterfly story?'

It turns out that when his wife was dying a year before he had bought her a beautiful white butterfly nightgown inlaid with embroidered butterflies. Just after she died in the hospital in the south of Sydney, Nikolai was standing on the concrete balcony watching a boat that had been there all week, sail out to sea. An orange butterfly landed beside his hand on the balustrade. 'What's that doing **here** of all places?', he wondered. When he made the connection between the butterfly and what his wife was wearing, the butterfly danced a figure of eight and flew away. He realised that his wife Ellie was saying goodbye and that all would be well.

A year to the day of her burial on Christmas Eve, that huge orange butterfly had appeared in Saint James King Street where he was in the congregation with his daughter Kate. And two weeks later he invited me out. So the journey continues.

Sally Mordike made this beautiful butterfly quilt when I was priest at Holy Covenant, Jamison, in Canberra for nine years, and we put it up on the wall there. When I left I took it with me, and I hung it in my office in Sale, Gippsland where I was Dean at the cathedral. When we moved back here to Canberra just before Christmas last year we decided to put it in my meditation room, my spiritual direction room, and ended up sitting in front of it daily for morning and evening meditation. It is a wonderful symbol of hope and new life don't you think, so vibrant and alive.

'I came that you may have life, life in all its fullness', the Jesus of St John's gospel said. (John 10:10) This little verse has found its way into my life, and formed it. What does it mean, Jesus saying 'I came': God with us, God enfleshed, God human. God among us, within us in between us, God who gets what it's like to be human, came that we may have abundant life.

'I came that You may have life'. I think we would have life without Jesus, that we may have a beautiful full rich life, life with its shitty times and its exuberant times, with its quiet joys, desperation, confusion, grief, pain, and joy. But somehow, for me, a life of faith, invites more, more depth somehow?

Life is a very rich tapestry and the invitation is to really live our lives. Surely we can do no other? But do we? Do we really live? Jesus' invitation is to live life in its fullness, that is to sit in whatever is happening to us whatever our choices, to sit with, to pay attention, to suck the juice out of it. Life in all its fullness, whether I am grieving, in love, starting a new job, trying hard to make ends meet, celebrating the birth of a child or a grandchild, honouring the death of someone I love: life in its fullness, living each day. And knowing God desires and enables that fullness is helpful as I rest in the Divine in meditation.

Here I am, at Benedictus, 10 years on. I was there at the beginning. And here I am again, 10 years later, opening to this community. I have been a part of evening meditation for awhile now. It has become part of my daily practice of prayer alongside morning meditation at 8:15am every day on zoom. There have been some gifts in COVID time!

Nikolai and I also say morning prayer using the Northumbria Community liturgy, when we first wake up. And after that time of prayer, then, reading, writing and reflecting, I always walk. Now I walk on Lyneham Ridge behind my home. I do miss walking around the lakes in Sale Victoria, where we were for five years.

These practices open me to the fullness of life, to the fullness of the spiritual bodily life that I live. In the morning I hear wrens twittering in the background. I smell the fresh damp eucalypts. I see the grass bowed over with raindrops. I feel the sun on my skin. This is life at the beginning of 2022. I wonder what fullness of life will mean for me this year?

I was born in a small country town in rural New South Wales. I was born in Cowra, a place I went back to when I was newly marriage married to Nikolai when I was in my early 40s. Time with Nikolai this last 20 years has been a time of joy, of being loved. It hasn't always been easy. We are both strong people and broken people but we have both learnt so much and lived the fullness. 20 years before that, when I was 19, my boyfriend David Stegemann was killed in a car accident in Victoria. Much of the first part of my life was living with grief. There was sadness, there was pain. It was a rollercoaster and I used to sit down by the lake to remember David, a rower who was also an artist and was studying forestry at the ANU.

After school, I went to Japan as an exchange student I lived with a Buddhist family a Christian family, Shinto family and I learnt about different faiths and cultures. I learnt about bowing rather than shaking hands, something we do these days it's seems. I learnt about eating with chopsticks rather than a knife and fork and I learnt about honour and reverence and beauty. An aesthetic of clarity. When I was learning tea ceremony I learnt about just doing what is necessary with reverence and honour in a spirit of service.

After Japan, I did a science degree at ANU in psychology and biochemistry. I thought I'd be a teacher then, after David died, but studied social work at La Trobe, which I had wanted to do for ages. I worked as a social worker in adoptions and foster care, with small migrant communities, with the department of immigration. Then in 1987 I began studying Theology at St Mark's in Canberra, and ended up being one of the first women ordained in

the Anglican Church of Australia. My passions are silence, Spiritual direction, and interplay – improvised dance, song and storytelling, great for recovering serious people.

Last year at Easter I was exhausted. I went on a retreat to rest, to listen, to discern. Do I stay or is it time to let go? It came down to where I was going to settle. That couldn't be in Sale because I have no family there and it's not done to stay in the parish where you were working. Canberra seemed to me to be the place to settle. Covid heightened the desire to be near family. Canberra is where I have spent most of my life. It is where my 95-year-old father lives, where many of my friends and family live. It is a place where I feel comfortable, where I enjoy the change of seasons! I love the gallery, the Botanic Gardens, the library, the lake. And so we moved here, Nikolai, Annie our cat, and I, two months ago after Nikolai had finished his year at school, and Nikolai did his PhD viva on line two days later amidst the boxes!

We moved back into the home we bought in 2004. But it has taken time to settle. The first time I really felt at home again was last Saturday during the Benedictus Service, at St Ninian's, sitting looking out at the garden, enjoying the beauty, then hearing Sarah's reflection brought me to tears.

Last year when Sarah talked to me about working at Benedictus there was a deep resonance. I had been talking to a mentor in my discerning about what I was being called to. One question my mentor had asked me back in August was:

If you knew you couldn't fail, what would you most like to do? It is a question worth considering. I wrote:

Work as a spiritual director/retreat leader using tools like interplay and spiritual direction to lead, letting others do the practical work, ie with admin support, but working as part of a retreat team in a beautiful setting to create space for transformation and growth.

Build a small creative contemplative community.

Benedictus is not exactly a retreat centre, but it is a space for transformation and growth, honouring the deep things of life. So here I am among you as part of this contemplative community, here to meditate, to make a positive difference in the world, to be a spiritual companion, to support Sarah, to support you, to bring who I am to this

enterprise of God, living life in all its fullness supported by the Christ, supported by God within, around, between - mystery; bringing this butterfly symbol of possibilities and colour, and the image of the deep well fed by and underground stream.