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Somebody's Calling My Name (Galatians 1.11-2.2)

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When Sarah spoke to me and asked me to offer some reflections of my journey to this waterhole I was a little overwhelmed. I'd previously offered and withdrawn the offer to share some of my story.

I'd been concerned for the impact on my ego of speaking to a captive audience with a microphone to make my voice louder and 15 minutes just to talk about me I think I'm beyond that now.

I was asked to tell some of my story to share who I am with the members of the community and to reflect on the waterhole.

Well I'm a husband (boyfriend Marg calls me), I'm a father to Gracie and Daisy, I'm a son, I'm a brother, I'm an uncle, I'm a cousin, I'm a friend I'm a business partner, I was a sales manager, I was a public servant, I was a nurse, I was a hospital Porter, I was a garbage collector, I was a factory worker, I was a student.

I am a homeowner living in Ainslie, I love music of many genres it makes me come alive and I notice wisdom and our shared humanity and struggles in many lyrics. I've supported Manchester City football club since 1969 when Neil Young got the winner in the FA Cup final against Leicester City. The Gallup strengths finder says that I'm a playfully positive open-minded activator with spirituality.

It's a hard question to answer, "tell me a little bit about yourself who are you what is your journey?" ...but here goes.

I was born at Norton Hall Kirton-in-Lindsay in Lincolnshire on the 26th of the 9th 1962. Those who remember the time will tell you it was that cold cold winter.

My mother Eileen Mary (known as Lee) was a child of the second War evacuated and separated from her parents at an early age. My father Philip Jeremy known as Jerry or Jem was a junior officer in the Royal Air Force. Jerry too had a childhood impacted by war, sent to school in England at aged 7 and not seeing his parents, who lived in India, again until he was 13.

Lee was a teacher, and I was her fourth child. Jocelyn her first, was born and died in Singapore five years before I was born. After Jocelyn and before me came my sisters Janet and Katie.

My earliest memory, perhaps provoked by photographs, is of trying to work out why my toy that looked much like the lawnmower I saw my father use would not cut the grass but it certainly cut (flattened) the flowers that were in the flowerbeds.

The other option for this memory is the stern and loud voices that intervened to stop me.

My next memory is of collecting the white sands on a Mombasa beach and trying to cover up the concrete seawall that was so obviously not part of the beach and I was concerned that it be included.

My early memories of church are attending Easter services at my grandparents parish church St Oswald's in Filey, that's two towns down on the Yorkshire coast from Whitby, from where James Cook hailed. There was no religiosity or spirituality in those early memories.

In the early 1970s the RAF had posted my father to London to work at the Ministry of Defence and we lived at RAF Hendon. My mother taught at a new local school where she met Father Alan Hope a jolly and welcoming fellow who seemed to do a good job in pastoral care, and we started to attend his new church in the school hall. (Alan later left the Anglican communion in protest against the ordination of women, so he might not have been all good!)

I don't remember how but shortly thereafter I was confirmed by the Bishop of Edmonton. I had taken confirmation classes quite seriously this seemed like an august moment, I was even given time away from boarding school to attend the ceremony, it felt like a rite of passage and it sparked something in me.

Other joyful early memories of church include being one of 26 young men and boys being required to attend a local parish church in rural Somerset when I was at boarding school. Honestly my memory of this time was of being profoundly bored yet enjoying the comedy of the offertory plate being passed around and collecting 13p. I'll do the sums that's half a penny each from the congregation. Perhaps an even more pleasing memory was when a visitor who sat at the front of the congregation put a pound on the plate and by the time the collection was finished there was, you guessed it, 13p.

From Hendon my father was posted to RAF Brüggen on the German Dutch border. He left Lee at Hendon and Janet, Katie and I at boarding school whilst arrangements were made for us to move over to Germany. I remember a deep sadness as Jerry left, I cried and cried. In retrospect these tears of losing my Dad feel quite prescient.

Alone in the officer's mess in Brüggen Jerry met some American Air Force men who began sharing their faith with him. Giving him assurance and certainty that he too could be saved and all he had to do was accept Jesus into his life and follow the associated instruction manual- the Bible.

Jerry became quite the proselytiser. I remember dreading another talk about how I ought to live my life and Jesus loved me and what a miserable sinner I was. I

can assure you Lee Janet and Katie felt the same. Hearing that I ought to feel lucky that I didn't live in Biblical times because in those days if a son disobeyed his father the punishment was a "loving stoning" to get the order of things right.

It sometimes amazes me that after this experience I ever wondered about church and God and a spiritual life again

Yet for me something nagged. I neither belonged nor was separate. I knew that what Jerry told me felt entirely inauthentic but in there somewhere I sensed that something makes sense.

After starting my post school working life collecting garbage on the back of a truck in Brügggen I moved to London. My interests as a student nurse were about connecting to social justice "digging deep for the miners" and organising for the National Union of Public Employees against the Thatcher Governments cuts to the National Health Service (*plus ca change*). In youthful discussions around these and other issues I'd never deny a faith, yet I never had one and I'd say that I was a positive agnostic. I was restless and I was looking for connection.

I saw an advert in the Nursing Times to "work by the beach", I'd long harboured a desire to try the archetypical Aussie way of life and this seemed to be my ticket. Jerry's sister had moved in the early 1960s to Sydney. Her name and adventure loomed large in my imagination. Diane had told me on one of her trips to London that I was the most likely to be brave enough to join her in Australia.

Di was involved in the Church in Sydney, she had developed a faith that was gentler, less instructive and more open than her brothers. It was with Di that I had a blinding light spiritual experience on Pentecost 1988 sitting in my car on Raglan Street Mosman.

I started to attend Saint John's in Darlinghurst, an inner-city community, providing a refuge for the marginalised, the Rector at the time had helped an Israeli, Mordecai Vanunu, share some of Israel's nuclear secrets, that he'd learnt working in their system (a disclosure that later saw him kidnapped by the Mossad and gaoled for 18 years in Israel). St John's felt like a vital place with purpose and intentions aligned with a view of the world that I shared.

Yet at this time the influence of "the Sydney Anglicans" was emerging and things began to change. The message I was hearing did not feel authentic, the intolerance, the constraint of established understanding the restraint and demonising of difference, it felt like the love of a good stoning again.

I met Marg in gaol. It's a story our kids used to delight in telling their teachers at school, those delicious moments of uncertainty and almost panic in the faces of those teachers they'd told...all the questions, who to call, how to intervene.

I was the RN at Yasmar Juvenile Justice Centre in Haberfield and Marg worked at Cellblock a Youth Health Centre in Glebe. Cellblock came to Yasmar to make connections for a post correctional facility life for these young men and women. I showed off shooting basketball hoops.

We started life together in Sydney Gracie was born and we moved to Broken Hill. Daisy was born.

We went to church, connecting vaguely to communities. Catholic, Anglican our choices framed by the desire to feel connected and be authentic in where we were and the culture we engaged with.

Yet I've always had a Marxist view of community, a Groucho Marxist view I never would join one that would have me as a member.

When we arrived in Canberra in 2000 somebody suggested that Saint John's Reid might be a good fit as a church, it was. But when the clergy changed we noticed the connexion we had developed dissipate and we went searching again.

We live opposite All Saints and a friend had said that the Rector there might be more aligned with what we were looking for and so we moved. The Rector had engaged a curate whom we heard preach on difficult Theological concepts. I distinctly recall hearing the curate complain that on top of all these difficult concepts she'd been given preaching duty on Trinity Sunday.

We'd just met Sarah Bachelard. Shortly after meeting Sarah shared her experience of giving the John Main lecture and I asked for a copy of her address.

About that time Marg had been introduced to mindfulness practise and we had undertaken a learn to meditate course.

The process of stopping, noticing and feeling we're quite alien to me. Lee had always told me "you just get on with it don't you"-it strikes me now as quite peculiar to rely on the learnings of a wartime waif as the great wisdom for life.

I'd been successful in a career in IT. I was appointed to lead the Cyber Security business in ANZ, and later for some of the business across Asia, for a large American IT equipment company. These became hard times in our house, I'd been lured by the yankee dollar and I began to believe, that I was better than those around me and that I should be greater, more senior, have more responsibility. It didn't happen and I became frustrated and disillusioned.

The wisdoms learnt in war had taught me to grin and bear it, maintain a stiff upper lip, yet what I felt and had experienced percolated out of me not always to the benefit of those around me.

There came a time when the percolations of my past bubbled over too much, we hit a pretty dark patch and spent some time apart. More than anything I knew this was not my destiny. I also knew that some things needed to change.

We'd been around at the beginning of Benedictus before we moved to Singapore and in this dark time it was the place to return, a place of peace a sanctuary. Notwithstanding my Marxist view of the world there was a serenity, welcome and some succour for a hurting soul.

As I write this I'm struck again by these coincidences, by this gnawing feeling that something else is happening, drawing back towards an other. It's gentle; it's persistent; it's not insistent.

As healing happened, I became aware that this community offered me an essential safe place and where my contribution need be only silence. It matched my reticence in joining in.

So for me things changed as I spent less of my life trying to control it all. As I sat, listened and learnt to be, every time starting again and being. I've started a business – sharing an understanding of the digital environment we have all emerged into, we've just secured our first piece of business with the Department of Defence. It was here at Benedictus that this business took some of its early steps and many of you generously gave us time and observations that we have used to progress what we are doing.

Yielding to the requirement to just be seems to have opened more possibilities. A daily reminder at the evening mediation that I am part of a community that seeks to listen and learn from the other to sit in a tradition of those who have come before and to share that gift with others. A community each day growing in silence, bound by this peculiar succour and a constancy. For this day and this time and this moment.

I've always known there is a call, I've often known that the call others hear is not the call that I hear. This community has offered me a place to really discern the call made to me, to leave my judgments aside and to just be – what a gift.

Thank you to you all.