

A failure of imagination¹

John 21:1-14 John 3:34

Rev J Shannon

There is a lovely line in John 3 that says: “For the one whom God has sent speaks the words of God, for God gives the Spirit without limit.”

But oh, how we limit ourselves. In my own info war, I used to have a framed aspirational quote in the girl’s bedroom. This was probably yet another sinister example of how mothers place propaganda into tiny minds...but never mind. Mother’s day is next week.

The quote was from Brian Andreas and went something like this...

“In my dream the angel shrugged and said, if we fail this time, it will be a failure of imagination. And then she placed the world gently in the palm of my hand.”²

It’s not as if I haven’t seen “as-if” happen in the real world. When I worked at immigration, I came across a man so remarkable, I started to write a screen play about him. He had been deported 14 times. And kept coming back! How?

He escaped war-torn Eastern Europe as a young man and something of the atrocities he had seen changed him. Something broke and perhaps he was mad – but in a good way. He truly lived in a world where everyone was good and everyone had potential. His desire to live in Australia was based on his need for open air, sunshine and freedom in his words, “a land where everyone gets a go.”

Despite the Australian government deporting him on numerous occasions, he returned. He was able to because everyone he met believed in him and helped him. He never lied. He did once formally apply to immigrate but was rejected on the basis that he did not have the skills needed at the time and his origins were somewhat hazy. He could have applied again – but he didn’t. He just didn’t fit the boxes.

¹ This short sermon was given after showing a *Work of the People*, video featuring the poet, Malcolm Guite, reading his poem “As-If” where he invites us to live in a world that is already the Kingdom of God

² Brian Andreas, The story people

After his rejection, he stowed away on too many ships and planes to name— aided by sailors, soldiers, aircrew and passengers. You know once you are deported, you're cactus with the government. There's no coming back.

But it seems he was love on legs. He changed anyone who came in contact with him including wharf-side criminals. No one could resist a man who saw only good in them. I was so struck by his character that I remember the details to this day. I have no idea where he finally landed but I am sure he made a difference there.

It was one of those moments where you wonder if Jesus applied for immigration whether he would pass the points test.

There was no logical reason to let this man in – except that he was good and he made the earth a better place.

Later, I met a quaker woman who was just the same. She lived among drug addicts and criminals, she lent them money and helped any way she could – and they paid her back, every cent and loved her to the end. After her stroke, one of the most cynical, biting alcoholics visited her every week and sat beside her bed gently feeding, reading and discussing world matters. He was devoted to her for years. It was a secret side of him I had never imagined.

So living in an “as-if” environment is not new. It's been done. Jesus did it and some did follow.

Wendy and Peter, their dance group and a host of volunteers from this church (you know who you are – stand up if you're here)

These people set up and ran the *Bring n Buy Bonanza* to raise funds for homeless. As you know, anyone who was renting before the bushfires was pretty well forgotten. Mick Bronson, Chair of the Social Justice Advocates for the Sapphire Coast, told us they had raised over \$160,000 in the last year (not counting what was raised yesterday) and bought 6 prefab homes. That 6 homeless families who will be moving out of temporary caravans into a house. As-if ordinary people can make a difference. As-if. I will leave you with a final quote from Brian Andreas.

this is a machine that's supposed to make people good & true & kind & the funny thing is that it works best when it's completely broken down so everyone has to stop what they're doing & get together & figure out how to fix it.

Amen