

# Transformative intrusion

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Jonah 3:1-5,10; Psalm 62:5-12; 1Corinthians 7:29-31; Mark 1:14-20

Rev Jean Shannon

Following on the theme of also/and... There are some things I can accommodate and others I cannot. I am uncomfortable in untidy house *and* I am an untidy person. I love to grow my own food and I hate dirt and worms. Life is so full of these also-and's. But there are some opportunities to think about the also/ands allowed to just pass by that just puzzle me.

King Fredrick omitted God from his oath of office. This is what the Sydney Morning Herald had to say...

"... the king's new reign has already ruffled some feathers in his homeland, after breaking with tradition to exclude any mention of God in his royal motto: "United, committed, for the kingdom of Denmark". Frederik has made it clear in the past that religion does not play a significant role in his life, saying in 2017 that he "finds it hard to believe that a man with a big beard would be sitting on the clouds". .. and then it went onto say,

"Several newspapers also noted his decision to wear a shamballa bracelet during the succession ceremony, which originates from Tibetan culture.

"It testifies to a king who believes in something that is 'bigger than ourselves'. It shows that we have a royal house that is in step with the times," he said.

"There has to be someone who gets upset over the symbolism in this, but he's not saying that he's against Christianity, he's just saying that you have to think something else is bigger."<sup>1</sup>

Well, Duh!. Of course, we have to think of something bigger than ourselves. Isn't that what Christianity is about? That's an 'also and 'and' statement if ever I heard one. Ok, moving backwards from the end of the statement to the beginning, of course, we *have* to think of something bigger. Like it or not, God created almost all these religions<sup>2</sup>. And almost all religions seek enlightenment through, and to, the divine - usually by honest living and kindly acts. When you study religions of the world, you find that almost all of them share the Golden rule, "do unto others..."

God IS bigger which leads be back to the first statement...because His Majesty cannot accept the pre-packaged image of an old MAN with a white beard sitting in the heavens – he doesn't believe in God? ...and he's never really thought that through?

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<sup>1</sup> Mary moved to tears on first day as Denmark's new queen by Rob Harris, SMH, January 16, 2024 — 9.08am

<sup>2</sup> I would not count scientology in this group as we know who created that.

His total understanding of Christian faith is based on what a 5-year-old saw in a picture. Is there a description of God in the Bible? No. So artists over centuries imagined an old man with his finger on the smote button and that was what was sold to children. Could the King be that naive?

I've been dying to tell this story. I just finished reading Lillian Daniel's new book<sup>3</sup>. Rev Daniels is a Minister of a relatively large UCC congregation in the USA. It is a progressive church very much like ours...only with young families and children. Lillian has taught Sunday school at that church for many years and watched these children grow up. When they have had 8 years of Sunday school, it is time to graduate into the adult church. They are invited to be confirmed. As their last assignment, they were asked to write an essay as to why they should (or shouldn't) be confirmed in their church.

She was shocked, dismayed...no, downright angry when many of these little darlings wrote why they could/shouldn't/ wouldn't be confirmed. Their arguments were something along the lines that a) they don't hate gays or transgender people; b) they believe all people of all religions should be able to worship freely; c) they weren't anti-women and believed in women's reproductive rights; and d) they didn't believe that people who didn't believe in Jesus would go to hell.

Let me remind you – they had completed 8 years of religious **education in that particular church** and not once, did this church ever promote any of those things. "They didn't get it from here!", she said. The invitation was to join THIS church. The problem is they had heads full of what they heard elsewhere and no capacity to filter or analyse the source or credibility. They just accommodated it as fact, just as King Fredrick did. This is a perfect example of non-thinking also/and.

God gave us the tree of knowledge. The capacity to consider things and re-think them. When we are too lazy to do that – well, we get stuck in a 5 year old's mind. We get stuck in some spiritual purgatory where we never move forward. We just accept what is – is.

The King's understanding of faith was about as deep as Bart Simpson when he said, "Aren't we forgetting the true meaning of Christmas? You know, the birth of Santa."

The season of epiphany is all about the disclosure of God's power and purpose in the midst of our daily world. It is all about disruption and possibly unwelcome over-

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<sup>3</sup> *Tired of apologising for a church I don't belong to*, by Lillian Daniels

turning of our ordered lives. I love the way my texts call this “transformative intrusion”. What these kids were missing was a transformative intrusion.

The Gospel reading calls on Simon, Andrew, James and John to drop what they are doing and reorientate themselves in every way: emotional, occupational and economic. It is possible to love a place and leave it.<sup>4</sup>

Paul’s epistle throws out all the social conventions under the rule of God so that “life in all its dailiness is shattered and opened, for the sake of a deep reordering.”<sup>5</sup> Paul is subtly saying that even social relations that persist and are generally not subject to change – will change, can change! The reordering means that everything can change – even the people of Ninevah. Jesus is preaching “all things new” including social relations and vocation. All things made new by the rule of God.

Well, tell me about it. I did not expect to be changing vocation so late in life.

How do these changes happen? They happen in one, two... or a series of dislocated ah-ha moments, you know, transformative intrusions...AND they are almost always AND moments.

I will share two of mine if you are willing to share one of yours.

One day, somebody said something, and suddenly I realised the body of Christ was not the church as some distant hierarchical institution -It was **us** (you and me). I know that is probably not a surprise to the people in this room but it was to me and I was an adult. It was one of those phrases that you hear all your life but never really think about. Suddenly, it struck me that what He left behind, his hands and feet were us, people I knew. There was no “church” as in a building. This idea was never part of Sunday-school stories. It was a serious ah-ha! – now I get it! – moment. Totally liberating.

Do you want another?

During my period of discernment when I had almost concluded I was just not homogenous enough for the ministry. I just wasn’t like the other candidates all white bread and confident in their perfect call. Many were the sons and daughters of ministers. I was meditating on my call while I sat beside a flowering poinsettia and noticed it had no symmetry. None at all. The leaves which also formed the flowers

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<sup>4</sup> It is possible to hate a job and yet love what it taught you. My 3 years in the Attorney Generals Department were the most miserable of my life AND I am grateful to have had them.

<sup>5</sup> Brueggemann, Cousar et al, *Texts for Preaching Year B*, p. 115

were random. Every leaf was different and came out in a disordered way. All the little pistils were different. They all had their little mouths open singing. It made no sense how it was put together but as a whole, it was beautiful. At that moment, I knew where I fitted in, I didn't, and that was OK.

(space for another ah-ha from someone else)

The season of Ah-ha is a chance to be hyper-alert to those moments of transformational intrusion...those moments when you realise the also-and's are teaching you something. The intrusions that turn your world on its head. These are the precious moments that teach us something about God and something about you.

*So I pray – Holy Father and mother of us all, pester my life with epiphany. Keep shaking up the world so that life is reordered again and again to you. Raise my eyebrows in ah-ha moments where I see you as clearly as the psalm: my rock, hope, deliverance, refuge, fortress and salvation. In Jesus name, Amen*