

A Reflection on Thankfulness

Ian Angus

Collins Street Baptist Church

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When my wife, at age 39, succumbed to cancer, I was left with two preteen-age daughters. What had happened to all our prayers? And where was the God I had followed all those years? My family was, as they say, in good shape, and although problems may arise, these surely would be manageable. We had all been active in church life and our family life was rich. However, necessary changes tore at our comfortable lifestyle.

When the diagnosis of Judith's condition was confirmed and local treatments were not leading to improvement, largely at the persistence of my in-laws and their belief in the alternative therapy offered by an alleged cancer therapist, we spent five months in the Cook Islands. On return Judith had improved unbelievably, picked up family responsibility and returned to work as a locum pharmacist. But 12 months later we bid her a final farewell.

In the following years I kept my head down. It was all I could do to attend to daily family needs - school lunches, uniforms, concession bus tickets and books, cooking, the laundry and managing my responsible position at RMIT. We fell into a routine. Caroline had piano and dance lessons. Fiona took riding lessons and eventually persuaded me to buy a horse. We had commenced attending Collins Street where my best man (Rev Ron Ham) had been appointed pastor and, in due course, I became involved in the administration. My friends saw to it that my social life was not neglected and I found new friends, and sometimes more serious relationships.

The girls are grown-up now. Fiona the younger one, a talented multi-skilled person married a year or two ago and lives in Tasmania. Caroline, a senior secondary teacher at Trinity Grammar, keeps an eye on her old Dad. We are in touch a couple of times a week. And for all the support I received over the years I am thankful.

As time went by the WHY questions started to reappear. I was introduced to a range of reading material that gradually changed the faith issues that I had thought were absolutes to the point where I came to understand the importance of experience. I came to understand that the scriptures should not be taken as literal history but commentary dealing with matters concerning the cultures about which they were written, and frequently had meaning to assist us in our daily walk. Issues that I had taken for granted arose. Was the virgin birth a fact and was the resurrection to be taken literally? Would the creator God who had written the laws of nature - that science continues to reveal - disturb them for a dramatic effect? Of one thing I became sure, whether the stories were fact, myth or metaphor, our God is mystery.

I have enjoyed a full and eventful life. And no one travels through unscarred. But the words of Jesus are still true - 'ask' and we do receive, 'seek' and we do find, and as we 'knock' our understanding and our experience enlarges. Certainly I hold with resurrection. As Marcus Borg infers in one of his books, I am not sure that the scriptural stories happened that way but I know they are true. And now, I experience resurrection daily in life, and for that I am thankful.