

Remember That You Are Divine

Pitt Street Uniting Church, Sunday 26 February 2023

Jayne Ozanne in conversation with Rev Josephine Inkpin

Lent 2A (Sydney World Pride 2023)

**Contemporary Reading: *Remember That You Are Divine* by Patrick Cheng;
Matthew 4: 1-11**

This worship service can be viewed on You Tube at <https://pittstreetuniting.org.au/spirit/reflections/>

JOSEPHINE

We've had a little reflection from Patrick Chang, one of the great queer theologians of our world. What he's saying is really, really important. One of the things I've found with this Gospel text from Matthew is that the story that comes immediately before it in at least two of the gospels is the story of the baptism of Jesus. And the voice of the spirit says: you are my beloved. You are loved. The heart of it is to know that you are loved - and then you start to see The Temptations differently. As Patrick is saying, don't just think of yourself as dust. It's these sins of power, money, reputation that draw us away from this Central reality that we are loved, we are beloved!

When Jesus is baptized, Jesus stands for all of us. So God is saying to each and every one of us, believe it or not, you are loved! Incredible! So let's not get swayed by power and money and temptations. My view is that the church, unfortunately, gets easily led back. Some of you know the story *Brothers Karamazov* by Fyodor Dostoyevsky; a fantastic story of how the church becomes an institution, because it starts worrying about power, money and reputation - instead of what is really true - that you are beloved. And that's the message, I think. That's why I recommend you buy this book and read. But above all, listen to Jayne now, because we're going to ask her three questions, like Jesus. But it won't be: *would you like some power* because we haven't got any to give you.

So, the first thing I'm going to ask you Jayne, is can you tell us a little bit about your faith journey?

JAYNE

Thanks Jo. Thanks for such a warm welcome. I grew up and got confirmed in the Methodist Church, which I know is some of the roots of the Uniting Church. I come from Guernsey, which is a little island in the Channel Islands between England and France. Ozanne is a good old Guernsey name. The locals would go to the Methodist Church and the English would go to the Anglican Church; and whilst we started going to the Anglican Church my father and my mother soon decided that all our friends were at the Methodist church.

It was in the 70s / 80s when the charismatic movement was taking off - and I was very fervent. I was a good girl! I studied hard - and I wanted to be the best that God wanted me to be. I joined the God Squad and became quite fervent in my charismatic faith - to the point that my parents actually stopped me from going for church because they were a bit worried I was getting a bit too keen. So you get the idea of someone very keen in her faith.

And I must admit I'm not actually ... (holds book up) you do need to read this. I won't give you the whole story because it would take too long, but I didn't know I was gay. I didn't know women could be gay, I was that daft. Little islands are conservative. On islands, you just don't have any role models. I did know men could be gay, and I just expected that I would fall madly in love one day with the right man. The fact that I wasn't attracted to anyone whatsoever, and I didn't understand anything of the crushes that girls at school had on these silly boys (as I saw them) was a bit of an anathema to me.

But in my 20s, I found myself falling madly in love. In fact, one of the first women I fell in love with was here in Australia, when I was on holiday. Nothing happened, but that to me was absolute horror! That God, who had created me to love and be loved, and I who yearned to love and be loved - but the object of that love turned out to be something which I thought was so abominable! It was a secret that I felt I couldn't share with anyone! Some of you may know that isolation - of knowing a truth about yourself which you fear, that you can't share with the closest people around you because you worry that they will reject you and judge you!

The stress of that took me to a very dark place. My body really cracked under the strain of it and I ended up in hospital. I then went through about 20 years - well actually at that point 10 years of conversion practices - until I ended up in hospital a second time. At that point, I decided I had a very difficult choice to make: either I couldn't carry on or I needed to find a way through - and that God would somehow have to forgive me.

I'd like to say I had a wonderful revelation - that everything would be fine. I didn't.

I really thought I was going to be walking away from God. And if you read my book, I had what we called "lived by" faith for most of my life. I'd been appointed, after my first breakdown, to something called the Archbishop's Council in the Church of England. It was an extraordinary choice by the archbishops - to choose the young Evangelical woman in her late 20s to be one of the 19 directors in the Church of England. It's an extraordinary story of favour. I have been in jungles in Burma and seen bullets literally whiz past. I've walked into the White House into the West Wing and had lunch. God does the most extraordinary things.

And yet - and yet - I couldn't claim this healing, because of course there was nothing to heal. But it would take me a lifetime to realize that. Through a process of coming out, and through a process of God's grace, and a process of wonderful people coming alongside - I knew that I was loved and lovable just as I am. I fell madly in love with a woman who loved me and I came alive! I think the beauty, and the fruit, of love is something that no one can quench.

I knew that at some point I would need to get back involved with the church. And indeed, as it's turned out, with other faith communities too, because the harm that church teaching has caused so many people is truly one of the greatest scandals, I believe, of our time! It's spiritual abuse writ large. And we have I feel, completely twisted the gospel of love into a gospel of works. Into a judgment book, where the Bible has been used to hit people, rather than to give them light and life. And that battle, if you want to call it that - I call it journey - is where we are at as a church.

I know that's a very long answer, Jo. I do desperately! Can I just describe a turning point for me? The reason why this book is called "Just Love". I start right at my darkest point in my first breakdown. I'd run away from the hospital, the place where I had been for nearly six months, because it had been so abusive! I got home and I went to bed and I basically (and forgive me - perhaps a bit of a trigger warning - I hope this isn't where any of you've been) but I just wanted to die. I just couldn't carry on. I wasn't going to do anything. I just hadn't got the strength of heart or soul or mind to carry on, in what seemed a horrendously difficult path.

I fell asleep and I woke up - much to my frustration. And I remember lying in bed saying: *dear Lord, I feel like an animal. I eat, I sleep, I go to the bathroom, you know I act just like an animal. What makes me any different to an animal?*

And out of nowhere ... (was it an audible voice ... was it a voice I've known all my life?) said to me: *Jayne, your ability to love.* I remember thinking about that and going: *no I'm not having that. My cat loves me, animals love, and this voice saying - ah Jayne, but you can choose to respond in love to any situation I put you in, because I am love! And I am in you and you are in me. Just love!* That's why the book is called "Just Love". And I believe that is the message that we carry into an aching world. But it is the power of God's love, the power of love that casts out fear, that casts out the judgment. That is the message that we carry. But we have to know it ourselves first. And that's what you, as a wonderful loving community, are showing to each other.

Sorry. Very long.

JOSEPHINE

Jayne, tell us a little bit about what you're doing at the moment. I know you're involved in so many different areas. But what are the things that are particularly on your heart at the moment?

JAYNE

Goodness! Well, I suppose first and foremost there's a lot on my heart at the moment. I've set up and chair something called the UK Ban Conversion Therapy. We call it Conversion Therapy / Conversion Practices Coalition. I've been involved because I went through it and nearly died because of it! I've been adamant that we must ban these harmful practices, of which the vast majority are in religious settings. But they're not just in religious settings. It's something I've been working with in communities around the world. Australia, particularly in Victoria, have worked hard to get legislation that works. I believe the Premiers in New South Wales and Victoria have just agreed to bring something forward. Banning conversion practices is something practical.

But I also set up, as Jo mentioned, I have a foundation called the Ozanne Foundation, a group which tries to fund me. Although we have no funding - and in fact we're having a bit of a problem at the moment because we're looking at how many days a week we can afford to pay me. So, if you're in a position to support us, please do. But we set up something called the Global Interfaith Commission on LGBT Lives - and this brings together hundreds of senior faith leaders from around the world.

My gift, I suppose, is to try and work with senior faith leaders. So I met Pope Francis back in 2019, and I worked with Archbishops and Bishops and Chief Rabbis and Imams. The Global Interfaith Commission brought together those who are affirming so that, together, their voices can be amplified, and so that they can make statements. So, we've apologized for the harm that religious teaching has caused and continues to cause. And we have called for an international ban on conversion therapy. And we've called for an end of criminalising homosexuality. And we've worked on safeguarding principles together. So, trying to bring that positive voice, because often the faith leader can be the only voice in their denomination, or in their country. But, together, there is strength in numbers. So that's something we're doing back home.

Though, at the moment, some of you may know we've been having quite a difficult time in the Church of England. We've just had a week of General Synod where we were looking primarily at what we should do about LGBT relationships. It's a process that's taken us decades and we got breadcrumbs! I mean we got, supposedly, prayers of what they've called "blessings", but they're actually just blessings on the individual not on their relationship.

I was calling for some honesty about the fact that, actually, we really need to sort out the issue that half the church believes that same-sex marriage is what we want, and a third of the church believes that that will send us to hell! And they've got all the power! There's half of us who believe that God is with us. We need to be honest about this and stop fudging it, and stop trying to come up with words that mean one thing to one group and another thing to another group. I didn't quite win out and we need to see which way God calls us in the next few months. I know I'm at a crossroads.

Standing in this difficult space is costly, and I find it hard. I would ask for your prayers, because I need to discern how much I can cope with. I'm being very honest with you about whether I can continue to carry on in such a wounding space. You know, just two days ago, I learned that on the day of the vote in General Synod, one of our LGBT members in Synod got very badly beaten up and attacked. A terrible hate crime!

And that reminded me that we have to carry on, because we have to stand against this hate. And we have to speak up for those who have no voice. And that requires all of you too! Don't just look to the few of us at the front. We need that silence to be broken. We need our allies to stand up. We need people to challenge bigotry. Or just that awful little homophobic joke. We need people to say no! That's not on! Not in my name! Forgive me, you're probably doing that already. But that's what's needed. It's for a whole Army to stand up!

JOSEPHINE

Thank you. And finally, you've spoken about the struggle, but also lots of achievements. Where do you see hope at the moment? And in moving forward, not necessarily in the church, but in God's love and time?

JAYNE

Well the truth is, isn't it, that change is always ever in one direction. I mean, there might be the odd individual who goes from being what we call in England progressive, back a bit, but change is always in one direction. In terms of people encountering the real lives of LGBT people, they see the love. They see the fruit. And they become affirming. I know that the church is changing, that religions are changing – but maybe not at the speed we want.

But more importantly, my focus is on what God is doing in the broader public square. What's God doing in the world? Because I look at a younger generation who, if I could be frank, I don't know what it's like over here, but who don't just feel indifferent towards the church. Many of them just hate it, because they think it's a place of such hypocrisy and abuse and judgments. And yet they're fascinated in spirituality. And they have a deep sense of justice. And they have a great love of our earth and of the environment. And they're hungry for truth!

I must admit, I'm in a very privileged position I suppose. Because I am quite vocal in the media, I have wonderful opportunities to speak about my faith. People can't get their head around "*why do you continue to be a Christian given everything you've been through*"? But that voice in the public square allows me to talk with people who wouldn't go anywhere near the church, and tell them about the love of God; and sort of bypass, dare I say, the institution.

Now that may be a bit of a dangerous - I mean others may want to reflect on this - but what I'm trying to say is: God has got a plan, with or without institutional church. God will raise up people to talk about God's love, about a healing message of justice and redemption, of our stewardship of the Earth. And that message will get out despite all our problems. And in fact, don't feel that you have to get ordained (although do get ordained if that's what you think you'd need to do) but know that God can use you in your workplace, in your school, in your home, in your community group - because it's your authenticity, it's your integrity that people respond to.

People joke at home, but I often get more opportunities to talk about my faith than the Archbishop! I'm sure he's a bit frustrated about that but that's God. I'm not saying he shouldn't be of course. He should carry on. But people respond to what they see as authenticity.

And that gives me hope, that God has a plan, even if we can't see it.

Thank you