

Two ways

A close-up photograph of a hand wearing a purple, textured knit sweater, turning a brass door handle. The hand is positioned on a wooden floor, and the door frame is visible in the background. The lighting is warm and natural, highlighting the textures of the sweater, the metal of the handle, and the wood of the floor.

By Anne Bonnefin

In Matthew chapter 4:1-11 we read about Jesus being tempted by the devil in the wilderness. Several times the devil tempts him and each time Jesus has a reply.

How did Jesus respond? ...Instead of choosing to live in his own power he decided to recognise the grace of God and to move more deeply in that reality. Jesus weighed up his options.... the devil was shouting at him - give in to your greed, your selfishness, your need to be right, to consume far more than you need. Put yourself above all others! Jesus rejected what the devil was offering... Have you ever asked why? What compelled him to reject the power he was being offered?

For me this story is about what awaits us if we move within that alternative reality - within that light and love of God.

We are asked to humble ourselves before God and be honest about the things in our lives that draw us further away and just as importantly we are asked to open ourselves to God's love and forgiveness. The story in the scriptures is not just pointing us away from something but towards a new depth of committed living. So even within our human vulnerability we find the strength and love of God.

What if what awaits as we move deeper, stretch our faith, is far more? What if we see more and more the world from God's perspective? What if we discover God's love for us is endless, eternal and filled with awe? Where does this take us but to the very core of our being and to discover that holy ground is where-ever we walk with God.



I have a door between my kitchen and sitting room. My granddaughter loves to go in and out of this door. I let her shut the door and open the door. The old fashioned door knob is just Isla height and the old door shuts easily with her guidance. She loves going into the kitchen and shutting the door, or wheeling her stroller into the kitchen and leaving teddy in there. She loves knocking on the door and I always answer.

Last week my daughter in law Amy visited with Isla. Isla loves the toys and games at my house but at some stage Isla moved to the door and shut it. Amy immediately said to her "Don't play with the door Isla." It was then that I realised how much enjoyment we both got from this door. "I let her play with that door all the time." I mumbled....

....One weekend a month I join my fellow Counselling and Art Therapy students in the city for class. This semester we are practicing counselling each other. It is an intimate group of students and I shared with them about Isla and the doorway and the different perspectives grandmothers and mothers have.

A few days later I found myself in a practice counselling session with Sandy. I shared the challenges I was having in making decisions about life and work balance. The past few months I've really been working through the dilemma of how I could work less and have more time to complete my Art Therapy and Counselling courses. Is this the time to close my business, continue with my job as Communications Coordinator for the church and move to another phase in my life? These were questions I was posing that day in the practice counseling session. Sandy patiently listened to my dilemma.... finally she said.... So you allow your granddaughter to have joy walking through doorways

but you are not allowing yourself. It stopped me in my tracks... yes joy... what joy am I shutting out of my life by not moving forward?

What if you truly moved from the perspective of knowing you are surrounded by diving grace. How would you look at your journey differently? How would you act differently? What would you do differently? As we contemplate what the future looks like for the church here in Australia maybe God has something more in store for us. What if God is ahead of us - calling us to our best selves - what if all it takes is for us to open doors - not out of obligation or responsibility but because of joy?...

...One of the joys of skiing in Japan was the time I had to spend in contemplation. Don't get me wrong skiing is hard work. Even getting to the slopes is hard work. All the gear, walking in the stiff boots on slippery slopes or stairs carry awkward skis and poles over your shoulder. Never-the-less at the end of the day I had time to catch my breath.

Every afternoon at Nozawa Onsen I would catch the gondola down the mountain. The ride was a solitary one and I learnt to relish the silence and the sheer beauty of the mountainside covered in snow. I don't know if words can do it justice. There was something special about being high above the ground moving effortlessly down the mountain suspended by wires and heavy pullies. It was a time of contemplation. Nothing to do. No-where to go.

I thought of everyone languishing in the warmth of the Australian summer. I thought of Sydney with the smoke haze hanging over the city and the destruction of the fires. Our beloved native animals, lives lost and land smoldering in ashes. Inside my thermal clothing I was comfortably warm. I took in the beauty of the mountain, the pine trees, the thick snow covering the ground, the crisp clean air, the panorama and vistas of distant snow covered mountain peaks and wondered how I could possibly begin to share the beauty of this place.

The first day I went to the top of the mountain all rugged up in my ski gear.. waterproof boots..the snow squeaking as I walked on it, the sun shining. I stood still and took it all in. Tears came to my eyes. Tears of joy and gratitude and a sense of awe. A moment of hallelujah...Just for a second a moment of grace.

I wonder if that was how Christ felt as the devil tried to tempt him.....Maybe Jesus' time in the wilderness isn't really about what the devil said but about the power of God's love that was drawing Christ ever nearer to the Divine.

We all have different journeys yet we choose to walk together with God. We falter, we stumble but walking beside each other we are stronger in our vulnerability.

What if God is waiting for us there in the wilderness, calling us to be bearers of joy - calling us to be our best selves... What if all it takes is for us to open doors. Not out of obligation or responsibility but because of joy.

BLESSING THE DUST

All those days
you felt like dust,
like dirt,
as if all you had to do
was turn your face
toward the wind
and be scattered
to the four corners

or swept away
by the smallest breath
as insubstantial—

did you not know
what the Holy One
can do with dust?

This is the day
we freely say
we are scorched.

This is the hour
we are marked
by what has made it
through the burning.

This is the moment
we ask for the blessing
that lives within
the ancient ashes,
that makes its home
inside the soil of
this sacred earth.

So let us be marked
not for sorrow.
And let us be marked
not for shame.
Let us be marked
not for false humility
or for thinking
we are less
than we are

but for claiming
what God can do
within the dust,
within the dirt,
within the stuff
of which the world
is made
and the stars that blaze
in our bones
and the galaxies that spiral
inside the smudge
we bear.

—Jan Richardson
from Circle of Grace: A Book of Blessings for the
Seasons
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