

Cystic Fibrosis Victoria Annual Memorial Service, 3 October 2010, CCSY

Again, welcome to Christ Church, and my thanks to Stephen Murby for the invitation to speak on this very important occasion: a Day to Remember. Remembering is kind of what we do here day by day, week by week, and year by year, professionally – that is to say, by virtue of what we profess – and so it is appropriate to gather here, whatever our religious convictions or otherwise; irrespective of our tradition or background. This church has stood for over 150 years as a place of beauty, peace, and refuge: a space in which to come and rest, or celebrate, or weep, or give thanks, or rail at the universe; in short, to bring whatever is on our hearts, and in our lives, and to offer it up, as it were – to give it some light and air and room – and, in so doing, to open ourselves up to grace and healing and love. And so you are welcome here, today and always.

I look forward to the quarterly issues of *65 Roses*, and was struck by this article from Kylie McGirr in the Winter edition (2010), ‘Learning by Risking . . . for us all’. Perhaps you’ve also read this piece in which Kylie reviews some recent research into adolescence and risk-taking behaviour.

Before I came to Christ Church I was the Chaplain of a University College. Much of my pastoral work had to do with helping young women and men, mostly in their late teens, negotiate the risks that come with that particular territory, to take responsibility for their choices and actions, and – not infrequently – to deal with unwelcome consequences.

It was certainly not my job to prevent them from taking risks; the College’s responsibility, rather, was to help ensure that risks were taken in an informed way, and in as safe and supportive an environment as possible. Because pushing the boundaries was an important part of how those late adolescents formed their identity, and tested out the ideas of their parents, teachers, and other formative influences, against their own emerging worldview.

So Kylie’s phrase, ‘learning by risking’, is one that resonates with me, and – helpfully – she reminds us that it’s not just adolescents who learn this way; risk is a way of learning about ourselves and the world for us all.

Any newly expectant parent soon discovers that the underlying joy and excitement of pregnancy is alloyed with waves of anxiety, amplified by every test – what will this hidden miracle revealed by an ultrasound become? – especially those who land in one of any number of ‘high risk’ categories as a function of age, or the apparent randomness of gene pools: an experience I wouldn’t presume to try and explain to anyone present. You are here precisely because of having embraced that risk, knowingly or otherwise, and bearing its cost.

The difficult reality is that any act of creation – be it a work of art, a new relationship, or a new life – involves risk, risk that is an outworking of the essential freedom at the heart of what it is to ‘be’.

Take human relationships. Love is only love when it exists freely. Relationships can be based on other things, of course – control, or fear, or need – but where there is no freedom, there can be no love.

Whenever we risk giving ourselves to another in love, we make ourselves vulnerable to the freedom of the other, our beloved: what if he stops loving me; what if she can't bear all the stuff I bring to the relationship; what if we can't survive the circumstances of our lives? Relationship – including parenthood – means risk; and the only way to avoid that risk, is to be alone: to be an island.

Is that a trade you or I would make with the benefit of foresight, or hindsight? This is not a straightforward question, as the article in the Spring (2010) edition of CFV News , 'Making Choices', illustrates.

But the fact that you've taken this time to remember – to re-member, or put back together again – suggests that you would not seek to erase the past, with all of its struggle and heartache, dearly as you might wish to rewrite certain chapters of your own history, as indeed would we all.

Someone once said the struggle of humanity against tyranny is 'the struggle of memory against forgetting'.¹ To remember, then, in the deepest sense of the word, is to do more than simply recall something, like reminding oneself to put the clocks forward an hour last night, or not. Remembering may be nothing less than helping to rewrite the future: warding off the tyrannies of our personal and collective histories – that is, anything which curtails our freedom to love and, yes, to risk.

The remembering we do in this place as we gather around this family table and share the funny, tragic, and tender stories of our clan, is of One whose nature is Love, who took the most extraordinary risk to create something in and out of freedom, and who shares the risky journey of that free other – in all of its beauty and its fragility, its possibility and unpredictability – who shares that risk to the point of suffering the untimely death of a beloved child. Remembering that story, over an intentional meal, can be both hard work and cathartic in turns; but we do it because we must: because it tells us who we are, and how we have been blessed; because it shapes and reshapes our future, and engages us in the struggle against the tyrannies that lurk within the wooden horse of forgetting – both for ourselves, and for humankind more generally.

This 'Day to Remember' is every bit as vital an act of remembering for you and for all of those who share your struggles but, for whatever reason, cannot be here to engage them in this way. What you do by being here takes great courage, and, in the retelling or reliving of your stories, helps to shape the future of all who carry the joys and the burdens of living with Cystic Fibrosis, and of caring for those with special needs. It does so by keeping our collective memory alive, and ourselves accountable to its hard-won learning.

Above all, it empowers us to continue the risk of loving, in relationship with each other, and with the One – however named – who loves us utterly, having learned in the crucible of our flesh what it is to die and to live, and who forever re-members us and all whom we love.

Richard Treloar

¹ Milan Kundera, as cited by Inga Clendinnen, *Reading the Holocaust* (Melbourne: Text Publishing, 2006).