

## Joanna Tulloch – transcription of audio clips

### 1. Early Experiences

I went to a Methodist boarding school called Queenswood which is in Hertfordshire near Potters Bar. We had chapel every morning. We had quiet chapel in the evenings which I used to go to quite a lot – it was just for silent prayer. And this was when I began to get a different view of God. More of the love and mercy, and less of the judgement and punishment. The only thing is that I was very unhappy there, so I didn't really get involved in things. And subsequently I got anorexia as a result of being so unhappy there, I think.

I left school for a year and went to various hospitals. In the end I was sent to a hospital in France, near Paris, where nobody spoke any English and where I was locked up in the dark. And that terrified me. And all the helpers, who were known as guards rather than nurses, were all Roman Catholics and they were all very High Church and they in themselves were not the sorts of Christians that I had begun to learn about at school.

It changed my whole view of what I was going to do with my life. Before I went into hospital, I thought I wanted to be a doctor and I was taking a scientific course of education, generally speaking. By the time I'd been in France for several months, I'd acquired pretty fluent French although my teacher said when I got back to school that it was 'gutter' French. And I'd had some time to study Russian on my own so I decided to become a linguist - make use of the gifts of being in hospital rather than just throw them away. And I didn't particularly want to be a doctor by then either. I'd had enough of hospitals!

### 2. Wesley Mem

I wanted somewhere where I felt welcome and that's what happened when I came to Oxford. I went to St Aldates, and I went to St Ebbs and I went to St Giles and Mary Mags, a whole lot of different places, but when I walked into Wesley Mem, even the first time, I immediately felt at home. I was impressed by the fact that there were all the different age groups represented, that there were plenty of children and there were, at that time, more students in the JWS [*John Wesley Society*] than there are now and it seemed to be a very active church to me. One didn't feel that it was just a place that was used on Sundays. And I liked the appearance of the church a lot.

I joined a Fellowship group as soon as I arrived. Eileen Coulson came up to me almost the first week I was there and said, 'Where do you live?' So I said, 'I live in Headington', and she said, 'Oh you must come to my fellowship group!'. So I did. And at that time the group included quite a lot of older people, and there was a great emphasis on healing in the group which suited me quite well, because I was still, at that point, more or less anorexic and I was beginning to get depression as well.

The Headington Fellowship Group took a service in Wesley Mem – I think it was an evening service – devoted to healing and different people in the group were asked to do different things. And muggins here was asked to preach the sermon. So that was my first ever sermon. And straight afterwards I got the hand on my shoulder and, 'You should be a local preacher'.

*And what did you feel at the time about that?*

Um, pretty nervous! I think I said I'd think about it, I don't think I jumped up straight away and said, 'Oh yes, yes please'. But I didn't have to think about it for very long.

### 3. Illness and Faith

Going right back to my childhood, we'd lived in a house in Shenfield that had woods round three sides of it. We children used to play in the woods all the time. In this jungle, as I thought of it, there was a huge yellow bog and we all believed that if we fell in this bog, we'd be sucked down and never seen again. And on one occasion I went to play there on my own and did actually fall in the bog. And I shouted and shouted for somebody to come and I was scrabbling at the grass on the bank to try to pull myself up but not succeeding. Eventually somebody did come... somebody heard my shouts... and it was our gardener, and he pulled me out of the bog, put me on his shoulders and took me home.

About 25 years ago, when I was going in and out of hospital a lot, we were in the middle of the prayers of confession in church one day, and I suddenly had the sense that I was being sucked down into a bog by my sense of sinfulness, if you like, and by my worthlessness and not deserving to be forgiven. And it was really like being sucked down into a bog and it became a visual experience. I wouldn't exactly say I had a vision but I was in that situation and I could see the trees and I could see the bog itself. And then a hand appeared between the trees and a voice spoke to me – some very gentle and comforting words.

'Be still my child and do not fret. Be still and stop your frantic struggling. You only need to seek me in your heart. Incline the ear of your heart, open the eyes of your heart, and you will know me with you once again. Turn to me, gaze on me and see how much I love you. Do you think I'd ever give you up? Turn to me, gaze on me. Try to turn away from all your failings. Don't you think I know you through and through? Turn to me, gaze on me. Leave me to decide how best to show you that you, your struggles, all your mind's pain are for me to gaze on. When you look on me, you see great beauty. When I look on you, I see the same. Be still my child and do not fret. I am with you always.'

And I knew that this hand belonged to the gardener and I have thought of it ever since as the invitation to the garden. And it wasn't a one off experience that converted me instantly, but it was a sort of 'conversion after conversion' in something like the same way as the Wesleys' conversion, you know, they were already ministers. I was already a preacher that had fallen into this bog of illness. And these words were repeated at other times during that decade when life was so difficult and when I had the sense of the absence of God more than the presence of God. It was at those unexpected times that I would hear those words again and experience again the gentleness and the merciful nature of the gardener.

I didn't at that time think of the gardener specifically as the Risen Jesus although I have come to think of him in that way later.

### 4. Joanna's poem 'Grey Green'

We met in the abbey cloister  
Among the slow cool shadows  
And gazed at pools of light.  
The stones looked down grey greenly.

I tried to speak my failure  
My poverty of loving  
The thinness of my friendship  
And the courage I have lacked.

And then we both fell silent  
While the stones looked down grey greenly  
Raising their algal eyebrows  
At the story I had told.

I didn't hear you speaking  
But the light pools grew before us  
And the stones looked down grey greenly  
With benevolence and peace.

And then I knew your message.  
If you cannot find the courage  
And your love goes cold within you,  
Do not worry, just take mine.