

On the Edge—Edgy



The magpie above is standing on the edge of our carport roof. It is surveying the scene below—will it descend to a place on the ground, fly to a branch on a nearby tree or remain in its lonely position?

There are times when we might feel that we are alone, uncomfortable, excluded and on the edge of society. We cannot settle down and relax but feel ‘edgy’ and not quite ‘at home’. It may be we are in this place because of choices we have made, or circumstances beyond our control such as our age, health, race, culture or beliefs. We don’t always know what to do, and when we decide to act, we do not always achieve what we had hoped for. Yet this precarious place might be just where we are supposed to be as Christians, ready and open to follow Jesus and share God’s love with others by daring to do new and loving acts. It is a place where Jesus was often found.

From the beginning, we read that Jesus’ birth was not what was regarded by society as ‘normal and acceptable’. He was conceived by an unmarried woman and born in an animal shelter and then became a refugee with his parents in Egypt. As a young boy, in Luke 2:41-51, he

was on 'the edge' when he chose to stay in Jerusalem, creating tensions with his parents. In Mark 3:21, when Jesus commenced his ministry, healing people and casting out demons, his family treated him as on the edge by considering him mentally ill and wanting to restrain him.

Throughout his public life, Jesus was often physically on the edge travelling along roads, outside towns, on a beach, walking on water, up a mountain and, in Matthew 8:20, declaring he was without a home in which to rest. It was in such places that Jesus was open to meet and minister to other people who also lived on the edges of society. These included the Samaritan woman who came alone to a well about midday (John 4:7-30), Zacchaeus, the tax collector, up a tree (Luke 19:5-10) and the criminal dying alongside him on a cross outside Jerusalem (Luke 23:42-43).

When it came to the rules the Jewish religious leaders or society expected to be kept, Jesus sometimes behaved in an unexpected way. For example, he refused to condemn a woman taken in adultery (Matthew 8:11), and he allowed his hungry followers to eat grain on the Sabbath (Mark 2:23-28). At times Jesus stepped into risky edgy places by touching lepers when healing them (Matthew 8:3), and eating with outcasts—tax-collectors and sinners (Mark 2:15-17). Whenever he met people on the edges, Jesus treated them with respect, acceptance, justice and love.

Jesus shared God's love with others on the edge, and we who are his followers are called to do the same. What might it mean for us when we feel we are on the edge?

I have recently read '*Outspoken*', a book by the Revd. Rod Bower, rector of Gosford, and known for commenting on current issues using large public signs outside his Church building and social media. He regularly writes from a place on the edge, as he proclaims the truth of God's love for those he sees as treated unjustly, although it sometimes results in him receiving criticism and even death threats.

When we proclaim God's love by our words or actions from an 'edge', it may mean: refusing to buy milk at \$1 a litre in the supermarkets,

contributing aid for farmers suffering from the drought, or writing letters to politicians protesting about refugees kept for years on Nauru and Manus. We may also be drawn to acknowledge strangers as fellow human beings by smiling at them wherever we see them, in the street or in a shop, and welcoming any who come to our Church, Op-Shop or 'Friends for Lunch'.

The Church is often recognised today as on the edge of a secular society. Past faults have been publicly exposed and the Church is no longer seen as a good moral example. We confirm this view when we fail to show care and love to one another. Yet the Church is the Body of Christ, loved by God, and is still at times turned to by people when they are confronted by broken relationships, suffering or death.

When we, as individuals or a Church congregation, find ourselves in uncomfortable edgy places where we would rather not be, it may be that God is challenging us to witness to God's justice and love for all. Do we fly to a safer place, hide among the majority on the ground or do we follow Jesus by looking around us and venturing where we have never been before?

Being in a position on the edge allows us to better minister to others who are *with* us on the edge—not above or below us. It is a place where we, surprisingly, discover many companions, receive as well as give God's acceptance and love, and experience the presence of Jesus in relationships.

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