

# Passion Sunday

## A personal encounter

# Be Opened ... to Death



Shanelle Bennett

Hi my name is Shanelle Bennett and I have walked the journey of life, thus far, enduring the ups and downs, the hardships and joys which is the plight of any human life. I have had many experiences in that time that have led me to believe in an immensely loving yet mysterious God. I have received the Holy Spirit in all the splendour and wonder that that entails. I've doubted my faith at times, I've grieved, rejoiced but I've endured.

However, one of my most profound experiences in life, has been the privilege to walk beside those who are facing their final challenge, facing their death.

Through my position in Pastoral Care at Mercy Community Aged Care, I have walked with many beautiful, memorable and dignified people on this journey. I was honoured to accompany each one in such a sacred moment.

Because what I found is that death, like birth is the most profound and precious moment and it is a privilege to be invited into that space.

One particular man stands out in my memory. For this story let's call him 'John Smith'. We had shared some very deep moments of faith and prayer together. John had shared an extraordinary life story with me filled with adventures and mistakes, regrets and yet final gratitude for a wife, who was still alive and family with whom he had shared his journey of life.

As John's children gathered around his bed with his 2 month old great grandson on the bed beside him he asked if he could see me alone for a moment. His family unreservedly consented and left us in the room to talk. He took my hand and he thanked me for walking beside him. And I told him it had been a great honour to do so.

He said 'this is so hard to do you know' this leaving the earth and all you know, your family, everyone.'

I said to him, 'I'm sure it is.'

He looked at me for a silent moment and said 'do you think I'm going to be ok?' and I knew what he meant. And I said to him 'do you mean, do I think you are going to heaven?' And he answered 'yes.'

I said 'are you afraid?' He nodded yes. I said 'John you are so loved by your God, let there be no doubt about that, you are going into His Loving arms and care, let go and let Him love you. Let him be God'

He smiled at me and nodded yes.

I said 'I have found God's love in you John Smith', and he squeezed my hand and said 'and I have found the same in you Shanelle Bennett'.

We laughed together a little bit and I said to him. 'You go before me but I'll see you in heaven.' And He laughed and said, 'I'll put a good word in for you, mate'.

He died within a few hours after that conversation.

But this experience, as with so many will stay with me always and I pray when my time comes and I face my own immortality, that it will be the same honesty, trust and peace that I witnessed in this man and others; that I can hand my life into the hands of Jesus as I face that final journey of faith. In a sense, I have learned from these elders of mine, including my own parents - watching them die in total trust and peace in their God, they have taught me how to die and I thank God for that lesson.



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