

BRIDGES

“Do not let your hearts be troubled. Believe in God, believe also in me. In my Father’s house there are many dwelling places. If it were not so, would I have told you that I go to prepare a place for you?” John 14: 1,2

Dog people, cat people. Coffee drinkers, tea drinkers. Red state, blue state, right wing conservative, left-leaning liberal. We live in a time when we define ourselves and others by our differences. There have been times, many times, when conservative Christians just scared me. I experienced them as mean and judgmental and I avoided them at every opportunity which was a good decision for me, honestly. But then I met Jen. She was of a liberally bent church shared with generations of her family members.

After much soul-searching, Jen left her lifelong church home and took up membership in a very conservative church. I didn’t even ask her why. I just sat in wide-eyed wonder as she explained her decision.

Jen knew a family who had experienced enormous tragedy. Their baby was killed in a freak accident and then only a few years later the father was paralyzed while playing in the waves with his surviving children. The attitude of this family was not one of defeat, victimhood or despair. Their faith in God led them to believe that good would come from this tragedy and that their whole family was held safely in the hands of a loving God.

Jen, being no fool, knows that difficult times surely lie ahead. We will all experience some sort of illness, accident or loss and ultimately death. The more cerebral, maybe-this-maybe-that, grayish world of more liberal churches could not adequately address her need to meet difficult days with faith and peace of mind.

Call that a cop-out, easy-way-out if you will. Maybe you’re right.

But here’s what I know. For all of our differences, I share Jen’s awareness that change, loss and difficulty most certainly lie ahead. And I absolutely understand that it would be better to handle the future with a certain amount of faith and grace rather than falling apart under the weight of whatever comes my way. We’re sharing a human experience and seeking ways to navigate it. That commonality takes away all the superficial labels that might once have defined Jen as different from me.

Lisa Bayne