



Thu 2 June 2016

On Mother's Day, I found myself standing on a double railway line at a bridge over the Hunter River, wearing white overalls with a red X painted on the back like the other 60 or so people with me. We were waiting for the police to arrest us all, having declined their invitation to leave voluntarily. So what brought this assortment of people, many of whom were sensible and respectable retirees, to a railway bridge in Newcastle?

The police didn't seem in much of a hurry to do this. They arranged and re-arranged the on-site processing set up they had brought. We were happy for them to take as long as they liked - it added to the time the coal trains were unable to bring their cargo to the Newcastle coal port. Two police launches and a couple of police jet skis held position on the river next to the railway bridge, until the jet ski riders decided they weren't needed and raced off. It was orderly and undramatic.

We were all well aware of the principles of Non Violent Civil Disobedience (NVCD), and had rehearsed various scenarios in the training sessions the day before. Our most senior participant was Bill Ryan, a 94 year old war veteran and an experienced climate activist. But a large percentage of us were clearly over 50 and had never done anything like this before.

One of them, Lis, aged 70, wrote "*I had some concerns about participating in the action and risking arrest, however the absolute urgency of addressing climate change overrode everything else. I have two beautiful grandchildren, and my conscience demands that I do everything I can to bequeath them a healthy environment.*" Janet, 67, wrote "*Future generations won't forgive us if we neglect to act.*"



Pamelia (right) at the Newcastle protest.

This diverse group of people were united by a common conviction - that we are faced with an overwhelming threat to all life on Earth, caused by our profligate consumption, the ongoing use of fossil fuels, and the system which puts corporate profits before the wellbeing of the population. This action was an add-on to the main event of BreakFree 2016 in Australia, which closed Newcastle Harbour, the world's largest coal port. Around the world, 20 or more civil disobedience actions on 6 continents, involving more than 30,000 participants united to spread the message that the era of fossil fuels must end now.

I've never been arrested before. Nor had many of the other people there. The very polite young policeman nominated as my arresting officer was younger than my own sons and looked decidedly uncomfortable having his photo taken with a woman in her 60s, in a clergy collar and now grubby white overalls, and grinning at the camera.

My sense of humour asserted itself, probably because of relief that the whole arrest scenario had been so calm. It became more acute as the contents of my bag were emptied onto the table and photographed as well - 2 apples, some cheese, a water bottle, wallet with ID, a hotel key and a book by Walter Wink called "Jesus and Non-Violence" (I'd thought we might have a long wait so I came prepared). The young policeman got flustered trying to fit the items back into the handbag, so I told him not to worry, I'd sort it out afterwards. We were then escorted outside the fence we'd climbed through several hours earlier, and joined the awaiting cheer squad.

It was by considered choice that I wore my clergy collar to this action. There are many reasons why individuals find it is necessary to take a stand against something they are convinced is wrong. My reason is that care of creation and a commitment to share justly the resources of the Earth is fundamental to my Christian faith.

The Bible, in both Old and New Testaments, repeatedly calls us to share the good things of the Earth with the vulnerable and the poor, as do the sacred writings of most other religions.

Our Anglican liturgy states this clearly - "You have given us this earth to care for and delight in, and with its bounty you preserve our life." (Thanksgiving 4) and "Loving God, we thank you for this world of wonder and delight. You have given it to us to care for, so that all your creatures may enjoy its bounty." (Thanksgiving 5)

The Lord's Prayer includes the words "Your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven". Christian faith is not simply an exit strategy from this life to the next. It is firmly grounded in bringing about a transformation of how humans live and interact on this our only planetary home, the world that God so loves (John 3.16).

Resisting structural evil is not optional, according to the prophetic tradition of the Bible and the teaching of Jesus. It is an outworking of the command to love our neighbour. Lutheran writer Cynthia Moe-Lobeda writes "*... neighbour-love, as seen in Jesus' life and teaching, pertains to whomever one's life in some way impacts or whose life impacts one's own ... given the current realities of globalization and climate change (our) lives impact people around the world ... Anyone from whom we can steal is sufficiently connected to be "neighbour"*". (Resisting Structural Evil, p177)

Why wear my clergy collar? Because it's a statement about why I was there. But there's another reason - many of the admirable and impressive young people involved in that day's activities saw it and smiled.

A few years ago I went with people from the Lock the Gate Alliance to visit politicians in Parliament House, as a faith community representative. The response was the same. People seem to appreciate the visible sign that the religious community is also committed to bringing about change in the appalling misuse and destruction of the Earth's resources in the interest of short term profits for the wealthy and powerful. At a time when so many see the Church as irrelevant, that can only be a good thing.

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