

Saying Goodbye to Faith

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Faith and I became friends in the 70s when our toddlers started preschool together. I thought of her as a hippie with alternative ideas about nutrition. We had wonderful long chats, often deep, always interesting. We routinely stood outside the kindy, chatting, after seeing our littlies inside and before going home to our chores.

Life went on, we left that country town and went our separate ways, but we had this in common – both her son and my daughter died comparatively young in somewhat broken circumstances. It was a shared grief. As we aged, although we lived some distance apart, we made the effort to drive to a halfway point at least once a year for a catch up over a leisurely lunch. It was pure pleasure. Faith had a big laugh and these were plentiful. She would throw her head back, giving voice to her enjoyment but never sounding raucous. I, on the other hand, had to temper my mirth, lest fellow diners look around in concern and wonder who let the riff raff in!

Faith's battle with illness is a story of triumph. She lost weight and her hair to a virulent cancer, but in the end, against the odds, she came back to life in what the medical fraternity calls 'remission', with her giving all thanks and praise to God for the miraculous result. Her 'joie de vivre' was contagious. She took up her passion for cooking once more. Morning tea with her was never so simple as Vegemite toast. At her house you would be served such delicacies as mini key lime tarts, homemade cheddar biscuits and finger sandwiches garnished with watercress which might be called a fancy name like rainbow ribbon stacks, alongside watermelon refresher. And her dinners ...well, they were gourmet works of art.

We had Faith for at least ten more years. What a blessing. When she sent me a message to say she was in a hospice, I was horrified. Post haste, I reorganised my diary, rearranging my schedule so that I could visit. The round trip would take up most of the day so I wanted our time together to be meaningful. I prayed about what I would say. What *do* you say?! For her part, Faith explained that although during the first episode with cancer she had fought

determinedly, full of faith, this time she was greatly at peace with going to meet the Lord.

I'm ready,' she said.

One of her nieces responded, "You may be ready to go, Auntie Faith, but I'm not ready to let you go!"

My husband and I made the trip north, arriving late morning. He carried the basket I had prepared into the private room where Faith lay, a shadow of her exuberant former self. It was all I could do not to burst into tears at the sight of her, so frail and wracked, bravely smiling at us. How difficult it was to find the balance between over-cheerful and maudlin, but still be genuine.

Our greeting was as warm as ever. Then I broached the agenda I had, by asking Faith if she would like me to serve her communion? She was thrilled. I set out my little travel communion set on her mobile tray, then said, 'First, would you allow me to wash your feet and refresh you in body and spirit?'

She laughed at that idea as she said, 'Yes.'

I folded back the sheet covering Faith's painfully thin feet and lifted them onto a towel, while my husband filled the small plastic bowl I had brought with tepid water. After the token washing, I anointed her feet with fragrant rose geranium oil, mixed with my tears, then did the same to her slim hands. I cherish the memory of her look of contentment as I massaged her bony fingers.

I had brought along a rather beautiful bone china cup and saucer that had been gifted to me. I poured in some pure spring water and served it to Faith, with words to the effect that she was a woman of the Most High God and I was giving her a cup of cold water in His name. Her eyes smiled at me over the rim as she sipped. I left the cup with her.

Communion was just as beautiful. Another visitor arrived and joined us in celebrating all that Christ did to make eternal life a reality for his followers, a prospect very close for Faith. I finished with a brief devotional word. Our whole visit took only thirty minutes, but its impact accounted for a great deal more of something vital yet intangible. Faith went into a coma soon after and died before the week was out. How glad I was that I did not delay in going to visit her by even a day. Her husband told me how joyfully she had spoken about that visit and told all her visitors about it.

Farewell, dear friend. See you in heaven.