

Becoming Vulnerable

by Rev Dan Balsdon, Sunday 10th May 2020

read online at www.revdanbalsdon.com

Around this time of year 14 years ago, aged 14 I got gastroenteritis and stayed of school for a week. it was the first time in my life I'd missed school for so long, and it happened that it meant I missed the long awaited auditions for the School's next show.

In November 2006, the school was to perform Joseph and the Amazing Technicolour Dreamcoat. Having not been in any previous shows, I was hoping I might get a part, and was disappointed I was too ill to audition. The next week, I went back to school and had settled that I'd miss out but to my surprise, despite missing auditions, the drama teachers allowed me to audition late, and by the end of the week I had not only got a part... I'd got the main part. I was going to play Joseph. My friends joked saying it was because I was the only year 10 who could still hit high notes.

We began rehearsals, had the summer holidays and then got back to it as term recommenced in September, and so did costume making. I'd not given costume any thought until suddenly I was presented with a gold belt and a white piece of fabric, about a foot deep and 4 feet long and told here's your costume.

To this now just turned 15 year old, who had only just hit puberty, wasn't the fittest, wasn't the most attractive, and was a regular target for bullying – this was not just some costume. This was going to be brutal. I was being asked to stand on stage in front of my classmates (and those at the time I definitely wouldn't call mates), in the equivalent of a white mini-skirt with a golden belt, and nothing else on.

Alas, I didn't get as much bullying as I'd expected I might, but stepping out on stage the first time I felt incredibly vulnerable, conscious I was stood wearing, what felt like almost nothing, in front of my peers and teachers, and aware that I would have 6 performances to go, including performing in front of Sir Tim Rice when he came to open the school's new music block that month.

As performance week loomed I then discovered not only did I need to come to terms with such a scantily clad costume, I also needed to be caked in makeup from head to waist. Each evening as we prepared for the show, some of my friends had the honourable responsibility of helping me 'orange-up' ready for performances.

Vulnerability was somewhat thrust upon me. Part of it was rational, perhaps part not. Some of it was through the behaviour of others, some was through my own fear. Some was simply part of being human. Some was my struggle with my own self-image.

My biggest regret of that time is that I don't have a recording of the show. I never had a chance to watch myself back, and years later would love to be able to watch and remind myself of what I achieved as I embraced the vulnerability required of my 14 and 15yr old self.

In Acts 9, for Saul as he travels on the road, free and powerful, on a mission to 'take down' the followers of The Way, he is blinded and can go on no longer without the help of others. Suddenly, Saul's life changes as he has to suddenly come to terms with his new found vulnerability.

I know from many conversations that in the last 2 months, in different and varied ways, many of us have needed to come to terms with our vulnerability. Whether or not our age or health increases our vulnerability, all humanity is vulnerable right now. We have all had to face that vulnerability, changing the way we live, asking others to help us, to care for ourselves and our communities.

This is not easy. Much like Saul, we live in relative freedom, used to being able to do and go where we want when. Ongoing suffering, grief and struggle is part of the vulnerable reality this pandemic forces humanity as a whole to hold and bear.

But to become vulnerable does not mean all is lost. In the midst of our vulnerability, it can be hard to see how we can get out, but just as I look back and reflect on what I achieved, as we read on in Acts we'll discover how much Saul achieves through his own vulnerability. I pray now that we, as individuals, communities and humanity, will allow ourselves to become vulnerable, and make space for God's power and grace to transform us and all the world.

Rev Dan

The photographic evidence!

