

The evangelical power of the jelly cake

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A personal reflection on conversion by way of a sweet treat

I had a wild ride in my late teens and early 20â??s, and in hindsight I was obviously searching. I explored the Divine Light Mission, Sai Baba and the Spiritualist Church. That all changed when we moved to a conservative South Australian country town, and I discovered that as a feminist left-wing hippie chic I didnâ??t quite fit in.

My husband, Adrian, and I tried a few churches. We went to one church, and no one spoke to us. Perhaps it was because we smoked and drank and belonged to the local theatre group, viewed by some locals as a den of iniquity.

Another church was friendly to start with, until we refused to be baptised by immersion, on the grounds that we had been baptised as in the name of the Trinity during infancy.

The church was trying to attract young people and sponsored a James Dobson seminar series on parenting. Dobson promoted a strong disciplinarian approach to parenting and recommended corporal punishment using a belt. This I vehemently declared to be child abuse, which probably didnâ??t help with my acceptance into the church community.

Shortly after my criticism of the Dobson approach to child rearing, an Elder of the church and his wife invited us to dinner. After close on an hourâ??s drive, on a rough unsealed road and dodging kangaroos and wombats, we arrived at their home.

Upon arrival, the host said, â??Before we have dinner, we have something to say to you. The Lord has spoken to us and told us to stop praying for you because you are a lost cause.â?? I was totally gobsmacked. He then asked if we would like a drink. Adrian, who was similarly shocked, said, â?? Yes thanks. Iâ??d like a stiff whisky.â?? (it was a teetotal home). Dinner was a most uncomfortable affair.

Then came the clincher. A woman from the same church rang me up saying that she needed to repent. She said, â??I always thought that you were a terrible person, but I saw you walking down the street with your baby in a sling and I thought you canâ??t be that bad after all.â?? She apologised to me for having thought so badly of me and asked my forgiveness. I cried. She probably thought I was crying tears of forgiveness, but for a young mum struggling with postnatal depression, her words and bizarre concept of how to go about repentance were cruel and cut me to the quick. I gave up on the church.

On Sunday 3 June 1979, I was having a really bad day. My head was full of fog as thick as treacle and I was feeling desperate and in need of space. I knew that the Anglican Church had decent music, not the happy clappy trite stuff like they sang in the other church.

I also figured that the Anglicans would surely be a stuffy lot who wouldnâ??t speak to me or bother me so that Iâ??d get the space that I needed. And so, I ventured in. It was Whitsunday. They sang familiar hymns, â??*Just as I am without one pleaâ??*, and â??*O for a thousand tongues to singâ??* and the BCP Eucharist liturgy was rather like the Methodist Church Communion Service of my childhood. The people were not intrusive, but were friendly, and not stuffy. Even so, I had no intention of joining them.

The very next day I was muddling through the morning, my head full of fog, the house a state of absolute chaos, when the doorbell sounded. I answered it in a state of panic. Social phobia tends to go hand in glove with postnatal depression. There on the doorstep was Edna, a kindly elderly woman who said, â??It was so lovely to see a young mum at church. Here are some jelly cakes for the childrenâ??.

That act of hospitality, with no strings attached, touched me deeply. I went to the church the following week and continued to attend. Edna belonged to The Motherâ??s Union, and the members were like mothers to me. They helped me with the children during services and didnâ??t treat me as though I was a sexual deviant because I breast fed in church. I was loved unconditionally by the congregation and felt at last as though I had a place in the Kingdom of God.

One of my friends started attending the church with me and Adrian started attending. Adrian and I were both confirmed and in 1984 Adrian commenced studies at St Barnabas College and was ordained deacon in 1987 and priest in 1988. Ednaâ??s jelly cakes ignited a rich and unimaginable journey of faith.

Praise God for jelly cakes, and praise God for Edna the Mothers Union whose precious ministry brought me back to Christ.

Ednaâ??s Jelly Cakes

Ingredients

125 gram butter

1 teaspoon vanilla essence

1/2 cup caster sugar

2 eggs

1 1/2 cup self-raising flour

1/2 cup milk

1/2 cup thickened cream

1 tablespoon icing sugar

100 gram packet raspberry jelly crystals

1 cup boiling water

1 cup cold water

2 cup coconut, approximately

Method

1. Grease gem irons well.
2. Beat butter, essence and sugar in small bowl with electric mixer until light and fluffy; beat in eggs one at a time, beat until combined. Stir in sifted flour and milk. Drop tablespoons of mixture into prepared gem irons. Bake in moderately hot oven for about 15 minutes. Cool on wire rack. Cut rounded tops from cakes.
3. Beat cream with sifted icing sugar until firm peaks form. Dissolve jelly crystals in boiling water, add cold water; refrigerate until jelly is partly set. Join cakes with cream; dip in jelly, roll in coconut. Refrigerate 30 minutes.

Date Created
November 20, 2026