



STEVIE WILLS (GUEST SPEAKER)

TRANSCRIPT

Sunday 24 September 2023

Scott Morrison: All right, well it's a big day, and it's a pretty exciting day. And many of you might know that the back half of the week, half of my week, is working for another organisation called The Different Co. Just changed its name recently to The Different Co; we won't go into that today. But two of my colleagues are here with me, Jo Wilton and Stevie Wills. So, can we give them a round of applause?

So great to have them with us. And, in fact, I'm going to invite Stevie to come up now, and we're going to put you in this chair. You get the really comfy chair. That's the comfiest chair in the church.

Stevie Wills: That's what I asked for.

Scott Morrison: How's that? Is that good?

Stevie Wills: Yeah, all good.

Scott Morrison: Awesome. So, Jo and Stevie work with me, particularly in the area of justice and advocacy. And that's been something that you, Stevie, you've been involved in for a long time.

So, Stevie's from Melbourne; how long, have you always lived in Melbourne?

Stevie Wills: Yes.

Scott Morrison: Yep. Well, it's a pretty nice place, isn't it? And actually, just down the road from our offices where we work in Ringwood. So can you tell us a little bit, Stevie, about you used to work for CBM [Christian Blind Mission].

Stevie Wills: Yep. I'm still there for a couple more weeks, but yes, I've been working for CBM for 11 years. And CBM works to break the cycle of poverty and disability in the poorest communities around the world. So, I've been involved in advocacy, raising awareness of our work.

Scott Morrison: Yeah. Awesome work. It's an awesome organisation. And, but now you work for The Different Co.

Stevie Wills: I do.

Scott Morrison: Which is great too. Working with Jo. And, what's your role at The Different Co?

Stevie Wills: Uh, I can't remember.

Scott Morrison: Can't remember! We all feel a bit that way.

Stevie Wills: The title, I always have to look at it. I always have to look it up. But basically, working in. The Different Co focuses on the integration of work and faith. And I'm in the justice area writing content to support people who are marginalised to stick at work. Yeah. And to understand their rights.

Scott Morrison: Yeah, understand their rights in work. And actually the value of work. And that anybody actually can work and seeing the value of it.

So that's a real core part of our passion, is that anybody can discover actually the importance and God's call on their lives.

So, you have cerebral palsy. Do you want to tell us a little bit about that and what's it like to have cerebral palsy?

Stevie Wills: Yeah, so for me, I'm very passionate and I'm a writer. I'm passionate about writing and I have a slow body. So, I live with this friction between what I want to do and what I can do and constantly rub. When we went into isolation, I was in heaven. This is how I live. So, I have, this year, I've handled the energy; but before that, most of my adult life, I've lived with fatigue, which means, spending a lot of time on my own, chilling out. So that brings a lot of loneliness and isolation.

Scott Morrison: One thing I've noticed, sticking with you now for at least 6 months, maybe longer, is that it's easy to judge someone before you get to know them; and to discover what's actually going on is not always what you see on the outside. So, as you said, you have to work with your body and its capacity. But what I've discovered about you is you have the most wicked sense of humour and you are as sharp as a tack. And in our kind of work meetings. you know, I guess I've discovered such a beautiful part of you and just how incredibly sharp you are.

And so that must be quite frustrating to have so much inside going on, but your body's not cooperating. It must be really difficult. What are some practical things that maybe able-bodied people don't think about that can help people with cerebral palsy or other forms of disability?

Stevie Wills: So, for me, friendship is really important. As is everyone, I guess.

For me, something that really helps is connection on social media. So, having someone see me, message, and say, "Hey, how's your day? I'm thinking of ," really changes my day. And I don't feel alone. People taking the time to sit down and talk to me. Just slowing down, slowing down to build that friendship.

Scott Morrison: Yeah. Because often we go at such a fast pace that we probably don't realise we have to slow down our pace to actually relate. Yeah. That's great. You had a few dot points, didn't you? Do you want to share those?

Stevie Wills: So, I've been involved in an initiative at CBM. Cohort 14 work is promoting inclusion of people with disabilities and you can look it up but I'll just put down a few tips. People are just people. Like, they're interested in the same things that everyone else is. We're not always thinking about disability. It's just not forefront in their mind.

Scott Morrison: Eye level. Talk to people at eye level.

Stevie Wills: Yeah. Sit down talking to people at eye level. If you are talking to people with hearing impairments, make sure they can see your face and that there's plenty of light.

Scott Morrison: And vision impairments?

Stevie Wills: Make sure you always take a minute. "Hi, it's Stevie here," or, "Hey, it's Stevie. I'm just heading off now." Let them take your arm. Don't push or shove them.

Scott Morrison: Talk to adults as adults.

Stevie Wills: Yeah. Well, yeah... Should I have to say it? Yeah.

And we've got a whole lot of resources you can dig into. But a good thing is asking people if there is anything you feel like you can't participate in to join community. And how can we remove the barriers? Inclusion is about removing barriers that we as a society have erected.

Scott Morrison: Yeah, yeah, yeah. And there's probably a lot more barriers that we've erected than what we realise. Yeah, that's really, really helpful.

And so they can also go to the CBM.org.au/Luke14, which is, I've seen that, it's a really good website if they want, if we want more information because that is our heart as a church so that we build bridges; we don't create barriers to people finding a way into not only the church, but into community. So that's beautiful.

We're going to talk a little bit more about singleness and loneliness now that you've already started to talk to us a little bit about. And I'm going to invite Eunice up, and Lara up as well too.

So, can we give them a round of applause?

Now, Eunice only just found out that she was getting up on the stage. It's always so good to have Eunice up on the stage. What a privilege to have Eunice here.

Now last week Lara spoke really well - I watched it online because I was down in Melbourne preaching down there - just about the normality of not being married. And how Paul celebrates singleness in chapter 7 of 1 Corinthians. And he does it in a manner that would have been radically counter-cultural to the way that we would understand. That, not only that he saw singleness not only as a viable - in some cases as a better - option to be devoted to, to have an undivided sense of one's call and vocation on their on their lives. And to be able to do that, to do the Lord's work.

He talks about '*ho ho kyrops*', which is to be concerned or to be occupied with, to be prioritising the things of the Lord. He talks about over and over both the priority of the Lord and those things. So, it's a priority of relationship with the Lord and the priority of doing the things of the Lord and the things that the Lord has called you to. And you get that sense that Paul's really pragmatic with this one in terms of his teaching. That his assessment of family life was that it was an open community, it wasn't a closed community. And into that community there were all different ways that people lived out their calling.

And I wonder if we find actually this whole area of singleness such a challenge because we don't live in Paul's time when nuclear families didn't exist the way they do today. Where

the family home was a very open space. There was a lot of coming and going. There was a multi-generation. It was very communal. Whereas today often we've become very - and it's actually a recent phenomena - we've become very accustomed, especially in the West, to having closed families where our doors aren't open, and where we don't have our grandparents living with us; where we just seem to have a very small family unit.

Which kind of closes the doors to maybe what Paul was trying to express here in terms of how you can be single but yet be completely fulfilled. That it wasn't going to be like a lesser state in life because he had a vision of community that I'm not sure that we can fully comprehend. So, the challenge is for us as a church, beyond the theology of that is, well, how do we be that community in society that likes closed doors and nuclear families? How do we be that kind of community when in reality 54 percent of people in 2021 census have never been married or are widowed or are divorced. So more than half of the Australian population are not married.

And one in four Australians live alone. One in four. And so, two in four aren't married and one in four live alone. So, what therefore does that mean for the role of the church in communities? So, we wanted to ask a couple of questions around how we can do that better. So, I want to ask both - and Lara, you're speaking on behalf of someone that wasn't able to make it today - but what are some - and I'm going to ask you in a minute too, Stevie - what are some of the real challenges for you as a person? Let me ask you this first Stevie, around building relationships, what are some of the real challenges with, when you have special needs around relationships? I think I got that wrong, didn't I? I'm going to get in trouble later.

Stevie Wills: I told him not to say that! [laughing, referring to 'special needs']

Scott Morrison: I'm sorry, I'm sorry, I'm sorry. People with disabilities - is that better? What are some of the challenges around building and maintaining relationships for you, Stevie?

Stevie Wills: I think I've covered it.

Scott Morrison: You've covered it? Yeah. Okay, fair enough. What about you, Eunice? What do you think are the challenges for building and maintaining relationships at your youthful age?

Eunice Fraser: At my age, I don't find it any trouble at all, because most of my friends are dead now. And I have to have friends that are younger. And I'm so grateful in this church that I've got friends that are younger than me but bother with me. And it's made a big difference in my life.

I've been here for 64 years in this church. Now you might think that's wonderful, or you might think it's dead boring. I don't know. But I've enjoyed every time in this church, starting

at Lugano.

Now, I find no difficulty in talking to other people. They might think they don't want to talk to me because I'm boring. But I haven't noticed that. And I have a nice home group here on a Monday morning. And that's very, very comforting. And I don't feel out of it one little bit.

Scott Morrison: Well, that's awesome Eunice. That's, I'm really glad to hear that.

But can I ask, what might be some blind spots that we have around singleness? Whether you're a widower or you're single again or you're single. What do you think could be some blind spots? Things that we might miss.

Eunice Fraser: Well, I haven't found that you've missed doing things for me.

Everybody's been very grateful. I love being married. I still have Gordon there in my heart. And when I miss him so much of a night, I think, "The Lord's with me. He's never left me. He's never forsaken me." But I'm glad I had the opportunity of being married.

But I also have in my family a boy, particularly, that's 40, just turned 40, and he's single, and I feel for him that the worst thing you can say is, "Have you had any luck with the girls lately?" You don't say that.

So, I've learned to close my mouth with bringing up children and everything. I've just had a family at my place, five people. And they, I brought in lots of food, they didn't like any of it. And so, I had to be very quiet and say, that's not how they should be brought up. So, on singleness, marriages, close your mouth and listen.

Scott Morrison: Very good, Eunice. Lara, what does the church do to encourage, support and help people to feel like they belong?

Lara Watson: I think, the lady who I'm speaking on behalf of, she said Small Groups are just so critical for this. And she particularly said about her Small Group is that when we talk and encourage one another, we don't talk as if you're a married person, you're single. It's like the status doesn't matter. We're encouraging each other as sisters in Christ. And she said that's just so important for her.

She also said, just on behalf of in our church, just people including them, including her in conversation is just so... So, so important. She loves, she said, and of quite a few people who I've been speaking to who are single have said this, they love that it doesn't just feel like this family service, this family church. Yes, we cater for families, but we cater for lots of different people and she said that is just such a difference that she has noticed coming to George's River. That she's not walking in to a family's service where she doesn't fit.

Scott Morrison: Did she mention any blind spots? Like, what, what can we learn?

Lara Watson: Yeah, look, she was so encouraging. She said she has had some awful experiences in other churches, unfortunately. But she said she really feels like the culture here is inclusive. She really feels like there's a place where you can feel like you can belong.

She said one thing we do do, but obviously it doesn't always happen, is if someone walks in church by themselves, the greatest gift that she received was just someone saying, "Hey, can I sit with you? Do you want to sit with me?" She said that's a tiny thing that makes a huge thing because a lot of people come in with their families or with their spouse. So, if you're coming to church by yourself, and someone notices that and says, "Do you want to sit with me?" She said, that happened to her the very first time she came to church. But she said it's happening. It doesn't always happen because it's a hard thing. But I thought that's something that as a church we could really keep our eye on and we can all do that, can't we? Yeah, it makes a big difference.

And just being aware of people who may live by themselves when they need practical support. Again, if you're in sort of a family group, you get help. Someone can help you do that thing at home. But if you're by yourself, things like just practical support is a really big thing. So being aware as a church of that is another good thing she thought.

Scott Morrison: Is that your experience too, Stevie? Practical support? Is that helpful?

Stevie Wills: Well, because I have a disability, I have support workers three times a week who give practical support for my NDIS.

For me, it's friendship. And one thing that helps is, a few things, is contact through social media. Contact through Zoom. because it's very well introduced. Yeah, a lot of energy, ways to connect.

Scott Morrison: Yeah, that's good.

Stevie Wills: But also, my personality, I am a really deep thinker and having a lot of isolation, I have a lot of time to think over theologies and other stuff. So, for me, if we just talk about what we did this week, I won't feel connected. And having the opportunity to see the deeper thoughts I'm pondering is what makes me feel connected and not alone. But that's my personality.

Scott Morrison: Yeah. Yeah. That's so helpful. It's, I mean, it's great that social media and Zoom has opened up, I guess, the world for people that are isolated at home. But to think also about the importance of having deep conversations, rather than superficial ones, it's

probably something we all need to keep doing, thinking about that.

So, are there any blind spots? Can you think of any blind spots that we might have for singles or people who are single and disabled?

Stevie Wills: For singleness? I'm not sure, but as a person with a disability, sometimes in Christian communities I feel like I'm often seen as an inspiration or a charity. So, you either underpin yourself or you're pitied. And that can be a bad spot where some Christians don't relate to me as an equal.

Scott Morrison: Yeah. That's so good. It's really helpful. Yeah.

Eunice, what helps people flourish? What helps people feel joy and hope in life?

Eunice Fraser: I think, as a woman, I ring up everybody all the time. And I think that's an encouragement. And Yvonne Lindsay, that was a faithful member of this church, she loves you to ring her up. She's not a bit well. And I think that helps, and I think we could all do that.

And I've always thought, all through my life really, if somebody's name comes up in your mind, do something about it. Write a little note, I know that's pretty out of date now, but anyhow. I do, I make sure I write little letters or cards or something and, or ring them up because the name's put into your head for some reason and I think we could all follow it up.

But here is a friendly church. It's always been a friendly church. When I first came here, it wasn't that friendly because they thought that we were coming in to this little sleepy town of Lugarno and mucking it all up. And they didn't like it, but they got used to us. And when the subdivisions came and everything and they had to put up with us coming into their little sleepy hollow that they didn't want anybody to know about.

Scott Morrison: Sounds like the Shire.

Eunice Fraser: Just like that. But to be here today, and I think it's the wrong day for me to be here, with Glenn, with him doing all that he does and has done. As for this lady here, a wonderful person. I just feel a bit inadequate.

Scott Morrison: Oh, come on. Come on. Lara, any last final comments from you and then we'll...

Lara Watson: Yes, a couple of things.

Just one thing I forgot to say: just not making assumptions where people are at. Like, just like we don't think all married people are the same when they're on the same journey. Same with single people, they're not all the same. And so don't make assumptions, which I thought was really good.

The end of the service, you know, when we all sort of turn and say goodbye, she said most people are needing to rush to pick up kids. But if you're single, you're just sort of left sitting, So, again, that's another beautiful opportunity to sort of turn, look, and find someone who might not need to rush off to get kids.

And lastly, what helps you feel like you're flourishing? Just knowing that you're enough in God's eyes. That His plan for your life is perfect, and it may look a bit different to your plan that you had in your mind.

And just the love and support of family, whether that's extended family or a church family. It's huge.

Scott Morrison: It's really good. Really helpful.

Well, I hope that's helpful just to, for us to think about that, just briefly talk about that as a community, the kind of community that we want to be.

Stevie's going to stay up here, but can we give Lara and Eunice a round of applause?

So, one of Stevie's great abilities is with words. Stevie's a performance poet, and she just performed actually last week at a big summit that we were running down in Melbourne, and it was remarkable. And this one, 'Dear Langtham', is a poem that you wrote a while ago. And I don't know how you memorise all this stuff, but can you, can you share with us very briefly before you perform, and then we'll finish our service this morning.

Tell us a little bit of the story of this poem.

Stevie Wills: In 2011 I got involved with CBM. And as a volunteer I went overseas and I went to Zambia. And I was at the peace for Zambia project and I went to this house and met with a little boy. He was one year old, and he had cerebral palsy as well. So when I met him, it was a really profound moment in my life, and he's just stayed with me forever. And when I got home that year, I wrote a poem called 'Dear Langtham', which was about Langtham. And, yeah, a couple of years ago I was like, "I'm still thinking about him, my poetry has changed," so I wrote 'Dear Langtham 2.0'.

Scott Morrison: Well, we now have the privilege of hearing Stevie perform it, and I'll try and keep up with you on the clicker. Let's give Stevie a round of applause.

Stevie Wills: And can I say when I met this little guy he was fascinated by my wheelchair and he stood up on it and held on to it and had a good look at it. And yeah, that moment was so profound.

Dear Langtham
my little friend
not so little anymore
you must be around ten years now.
Nine years now
since I was on your land
your home, I visited
my wheelchair, you saw
fascinated by it
you stood holding onto it.
That moment of time
the meeting of our lives
my heart has framed
framed still upon my bedside table.
Nine years now
maybe I should make it ten
wait and next year pen
write again
but life is not well-rounded
rounded out
doesn't flatly pave itself out.
You don't fit in a box
in any box
edges too straight
angles too right.
Boxes can only hold the concrete.
People, transcendent, translucent
through cardboard they seep.
You are transcendent
but you are not limitless.
I am not limitless.
You and I
curtailed by
restrictions our entire lives.
The preaching
you can do anything
is like sandpapering
my skin, the sting

rubbed raw
against reality
of disability.
My passion, creativity
and my physical capacity
incompatibility
Rubbed raw.

The words that flow from my mind
find resistance through fingers that don't flutter along keys.
They stub keys.
Fingers through which words must squeeze
to grace screen
must audition
for selection
for expression
within my physical capacity
it's incompatibility
with my passion, creativity.
Rubbed raw.

May you stretch out your fingers, your toes
fill the entirety of your space.
May you reach your own height
your depth
your width
push to your edges
press to your edges.
Your edges.
Not that which somebody else specifies.

My little friend
I wonder how you are now.
Are you in school now?
School splits open possibilities
breaks open opportunities.
School for me was not easy
and for you it may not be easy.
People can be cruel
or just unintentional.
Unintentionality can leave people behind.
I was left behind

never really one of them
never cool
never in.
Electric wheelchair, insufficient at highest speed
Amongst quick paced feet.
They took the steps
I took the ramps
the long way around.
So many conversations I never heard
conversations that bond friends.
Friends, sometimes one or two is enough.
May you know what it is to be known
to be seen
to be loved.
May you know
see
love.
May you find the divine
within corners of your mind
within the mundane
within your being
within your flesh
for he is in your being
in your flesh.
He holds your space
For you to hold
to expand within
to dance within.
So expand your chest
with your breath
stretch out your fingers, your toes
fill the entirety of your space.

Scott Morrison: Wow. Wow. That was so awesome, Stevie. Thank you for presenting such a powerful piece and you've got other pieces as well too on your website so we could listen to others as well. Ehat's the website?

Stevie Wills: steviewills.com.au

Scott Morrison: steviewills.com.au

And, the latest one that you've just done was wonderful too, the one about creation.

So, what a privilege that it's been today to have Stevie and to have Eunice, and to be able to think about this, and maybe just expand our heart a little bit more for people, in our church and for those that we're building bridges to.

Lord, what a profound moment. We thank you for Your presence here.

We thank you for what we've witnessed and experienced, both in telling stories and celebrating Glenn, but also in recognising that You are, You're wanting us to expand our hearts, beyond the hard lines and beyond our closed doors. That You're wanting us to be people that are genuinely growing as a community where everyone feels welcome. And more than welcome; they're included, loved, valued. And where we see people as people that deeply long for and deserve community. Help us to be that more and more, I pray.

And thank you for the encouragement of this day. In Jesus' name. Amen.