



When control gives way to wonderment

By Ashleigh Donnelly

The COVID-19 pandemic took many of us back to the basics. We were challenged to live a year stripped of its frills. Before 2020 I was guilty of an inflated sense of control over my life consistent with modern, western thinking. Then came March 2020 and our entire calendars were stripped bare. My trip to Rome. Cancelled. My cousin's 21st birthday party. Cancelled. Every event at work. Cancelled. None of us were really sure what we would be doing next week, let alone next month. As someone who likes to plan ahead and be organised, I found this lack of certainty over my future daunting, and even scary.

Then November came, and I had a baby. If I was ever to truly relinquish control, this was it. After finishing up at work, I spent November waiting and dreaming of this new life within me. Who would she become? And who would I become as I embraced this new identity as a mother? I'd resigned from my job at CatholicCare and we moved out of our unit in Ashfield to be closer to family on the Central Coast. Everything was new. And I had no idea when this baby would arrive. As the due date approached, I would wake up each morning wondering if today was the day that our life would change forever. And as night approached I wondered whether I would be woken by the pangs of labour.

Finally, the day arrived when our girl was ready to enter the world. Again, nothing about the birth experience was in my control. The birth plan I prepared became obsolete within hours and our beautiful girl entered the world by emergency caesarean 18 hours later.

As I rock my girl to sleep in the wee hours of the morning I am awed by the miracle of life. For nine months I carried this child that God created for such a time as this. As the night turns to morning after a few hours of sleep, I wonder what the day ahead will bring. I wonder, rather than plan, because any kind of routine is still weeks away. If COVID taught me to relinquish control, having a baby drilled it into me. I have learnt to be vulnerable. I have learnt to ask for help and to look to my village for support. It takes a village to raise a child. But it also takes a village to raise a mother.

This experience of relinquishing control has really changed the way I enter Lent this year. During Lent we relinquish control over everything in our lives- our time, our talents, our finances - and we hand everything over to God. In this Sunday's Gospel, Jesus tells Simon and his brother Andrew to "Follow me and I will make you fishers of men." Simon and Andrew must leave their nets behind and go out into the sea despite the threat of a storm.

When we venture into the deep we are exposed and vulnerable. In those first few weeks of motherhood I felt like everything in my life had changed. I still hadn't come to terms with my new identity as a mother, and when Facebook memories of carefree days popped up I became nostalgic for this past life. If there was a time in my life when I felt drawn out into

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the deep, this was it. And I was vulnerable, both physically as I recovered and emotionally as I embraced this huge new responsibility as a mother.

At seven weeks old, I look into the eyes of my precious daughter and I am captivated by the wonder of life. There is nothing in the world I feel like I am meant to do more than being this child's mother and raising her to be a woman of courage and faith, like the fishermen who left their nets behind to follow Jesus.