

[0:00:00]

Interviewer: Just to kick off then, could you tell me a bit about your background?

Jim: Well, I was born 71½ years ago in wartime Stockport. Well, on the edge of Stockport. And so, my childhood was very much in the aftermath of the Second World War with the austerity and the sense I think of people wanting to conserve the best from the past. They weren't experimental times. You had to wait for the 60s for that.

So, I was brought up in a fairly conventional but not too tight Methodist, largely Methodist home. My father was a Methodist local preacher in those days. But there was always the Anglican church around as well, from both mothers and one of the grandfathers of my grandparents' generation. So, we were a mixture.

But I gather when my parents got married, they decided they'd go to the local Anglican church than the local Methodist one and the Anglican was a bit too high church for my father and the Methodists had got a young minister and lots of young couples and families and stuff. So, that provided the context really for them and so I was part of the life of Dialstone Lane Methodist church in my childhood.

And then at the age of 13 we moved further out. My mother was sort of, I always like to think she was upwardly mobile, but never quite had the wheels to get where she would have liked. But we went slightly upmarket and we moved out to a village called Disley which is on the A6 between Stockport and Buxton going up into Derbyshire, though we were still just about in Cheshire there. But we weren't far from Derbyshire or Lancashire or even Yorkshire, actually. Just in that little part.

So, my teenage memories are of the village, large village, but of the village Methodist chapel which allowed its youngsters to play havoc with the place from time to time with various things that we put on at Christmas and concerts and things. I think three or four of us had aspirations and dramatic and musical directions.

And yeah, that really was, you know, I went to the same school apart from the first two years. I went to an infant school called Lyme Field, which was about, probably about ten minutes' walk from home and can't remember precisely now. And then I went, clever clogs here went to Stockport Grammar School which was one of the independent grant aided grammar schools of the time. And I was there from the age of seven till 18 which was a huge sense of stability because I could, you know, though we moved, I could still get to the school and I was, you know, so... and I suppose little by little during that time my favourite subjects were geography and English and would have been French or history, but the mix at that time meant that I did my A levels in English and actually it would be English and geography and history.

What I remember from – do you want me to talk about what I might remember from my childhood about sexuality at this stage?

Interviewer: Yes, that would be interesting. And also, a bit about do you have brothers and sisters?

Jim: Okay. My parents always wanted to have four children so they told me when I was growing up later on, but they only had me and my brother and he only lived three days and I never saw him because children were kept away from events like that. I don't think I ever, I have no memories of going to any of my grandparents' funerals, for example. And I didn't go to Andrew's. But he was born in 1951, I was 42, so there was obviously some difficulty that either my father had or my mother. And it's the kind of question you never ask your parents because you can't actually imagine them having

sex anyway. So, it was strange to ask who's got the problem. And it just never occurred to ask.

So, I didn't grow up with siblings and neither did any of my cousins. We were my mother, had three sisters, my father had one brother. They all married and they all produced one child. And we're all still alive just about, the cousins. And I've got one, two male cousins and two female cousins. Is that right? John, or is, no, it's John then it's John, Pat and Kay on my mother's side and Judy on my father's side. No, it's three female cousins and one male cousin.

[0:05:37]

So, we never, I've never lived in a kind of big family environment and I think we're all affected by presumably by being brought up alone and the pluses and minuses of that.

I think quite early on I came to the conclusion that my parents really weren't going to be much use to me. I don't mean for the basics and for the love and care and help to do whatever I decided I was wanting to do. They were brilliant at that. But they lived in a different world from mine and I somehow knew that early on. It was partly, that was partly a religious thing and partly a sexual thing. And I probably got very mixed up at that at that age because you really haven't distinguished between them.

And I have got two pertinent memories perhaps by the time I was seven. One, I'd won a prize at my infant school and had to go up onto the platform to receive whatever it was. And the prize giver was a local retired colonel. And I was very shy in those days and I had my arm in a sling because my best buddy's dog, we must have been playing too fiercely with it and he bit me on the wrist and I still have the scar to this day. And so of course he asked me what it was, and I just whispered really, said, "A dog bit me," and the head teacher leant over and said, "You'll have to speak a bit louder so he can hear". So, I shouted at the top of my voice, "A dog bit me". Well, of course, there's great hilarity in the, because the colonel shot backwards and nearly fell off the platform. But I can remember to this day walking down the steps off that platform with a secret smile, and I thought, "Oh, that's interesting. There's a world out there, I can make people laugh". It didn't make me want to be a stand-up comic, but it was a significant moment, you know.

And I suppose where the sexuality is concerned, I've often wondered where did it start, where was my first awareness? And of course, I couldn't put a name to it. But on holiday at the age of seven, I think I was seven, there was another lad I got very friendly with. We played putting in the putting green at Filey. And it was Leonard's legs that fascinated me. And I couldn't say anything more than that, as it were. But unfortunately, Leonard and I never met again.

Interviewer: Nice bit of alliteration that, Leonard's legs.

Jim: Leonards legs. Yeah, yeah. So, that's a little bit of my early years.

Interviewer: So, as things kind of developed, how did your faith sort of develop from those early roots?

Jim: I suppose it was, I'm one of those that inherited it. And I've never been a serious doubter, but I've been a serious explorer and not taking for granted much of what was said. Having said that, it was a Wesleyan tradition of a Methodist chapel, and my father was what I would call a sort of open conservative character who would change his mind, but he would take five years to do it. Which he did on the gay issue when I came out. I gave him full marks for that.

And so, but we were, Sundays were very much Sunday morning service and Sunday school in my young days. But I've no recollection of getting, I got fed up sometimes and bored, but my main recollection is that I was learning quite a lot and quite good at doing that. So, it wasn't a huge strain. And when I was younger, but occasionally it was even a sermon I might hear which I thought was quite good. That was before I was 13.

The village church in Disley, the chapel in Disley was a bit different. It wasn't as good and I can remember complaining on a number of occasions. I'm not going again and all that sort of stuff. And the one thing I think that they were very misguided about was that, of course, they presented us youngsters who lived from the age of 14 with the pledge that we will not drink alcohol. So, it was still part of the lingering temperance movement in those days. And being more conformist in those days and not wanting to make create trouble, I signed it. I tore it up about the age of 18 finally, but it took me until I was about 23 to be able to go into a pub without feeling rather guilty about it. And that was the strongest moral message.

[0:10:47]

Sex was stronger as a message because it didn't exist.. So, therefore it was actually operating more powerfully. And I worked out by the age of about 11 that my mother and father must have had sex twice because I'd been born and my brother had been born. And I thought a friend of mine, who was one of a family of five or six, their parents were gross because they've done it six times. Yeah, because the birds and bees and that's what automatically happens, right? And you see a total failure in terms of communication, communicating anything accurate about biology and about reproduction or anything about what you do with them with the power you have when your body starts to leak in a way it hadn't done before. You know, and great embarrassment about all that.

My Great Aunt Gladys was living with my mother and father at the time. When my father did take me out for the walk, which was six months too late, and I had to pretend that I knew what he was saying, I didn't know what he was saying, how interesting, etc. And I remember my Aunt Gladys was a bit more outspoken than my mum and dad, said, "Oh thank God he's got that off his chest. He's been worried about it for three months". (Laughter)

Yeah. So, that was, and I suppose it was... if you asked my father, he would have been One Nation Tory, if you asked my mother, she would have been a fairly centre Labour. So, I went lib really. Just out of that. And in a way have always been in my politics fairly central but not actively involved in party politics.

Interviewer: So, at that stage were you when your father spoke to you about sex and sexuality, did you have a clarity about your own sexuality?

Jim: No. No, no. And I suppose by the time I was about 16 which would have been about 1958, I knew that there was something taboo going on inside me that I couldn't talk about.

Interviewer: And at that point it was still illegal, wasn't it?

Jim: Yes. The Wolfenden Report came out in 1958 and it was the beginnings of literature. And what I can't remember is this particular event, whether I was still at school or it was in university vacation time. But I would be something, you know, late teens or early 20s. And there was a scandal involving the Duke of Beaulieu and RAF officers and one or two other laypersons down in Hampshire which got a lot of press publicity. But it was clearly

an embarrassment to most people and this was something rather sort of disgusting and it was bad and we didn't really want to talk about it. And it was right that they should serve a prison sentence and all that. Which I didn't do my morale much good. But it did mean I couldn't talk about it.

And yes, the incident, one of the guys who was imprisoned at the time was called Peter Wildeblood, and he wrote a book called *Against the Law* recounting that particular story. And I went to Manchester Central Library, because that's the nearest big library from where we were, and looked it up in the catalogue and it said, "Not on open shelves". This could have been 1959, 1960, 61, something like that. Okay, I have to go and fill out a slip, which I do and hand it over slightly looking to the left and right. And I'm told to go and find a seat. I said, "Well, I'll go and sit over there," which seemed to be not many people around, "and we'll bring it to you". Which they did and I just devoured it in one sitting because I wasn't going to go back. And again, it was not a particularly encouraging piece of work, but at least it was somebody else who clearly had the same kind of feelings that I was beginning to have.

And I did try flirting with one or two of my schoolmates, but nothing ever came to it. That was that, you know, that was after puberty had struck. I must have made the wrong choices, that's all.

[0:15:36]

But then I went to Cambridge University and that opened up in all sorts of ways. In terms of my faith got a huge boost because here were people talking intelligently in lively ways and it was the early 60s by then. So, very exciting. I was in one of the queues for the first edition of *Honest to God*. The last time I've seen the queue outside of religious bookshop. But you know, there was a ferment. And I learned a lot from the leading figures of the time, of John Robinson and through him people like Paul Tillich and Dietrich Bonhoeffer and Harry Williams in Cambridge and other people in Cambridge too. And that was all very exciting. And I think that nudged me towards a vocation and also to, I'd gone up to read geography, but at Cambridge, I don't know, you may not know, but as long as you get a Part 1 in one subject, you can do a Part 2 in another different subject. So, after two years I switched from geography to theology.

Interviewer: Wow. That's a switch.

Jim: And henceforth known as a geologist. And amongst that ferment, one was moving quite definitely from Methodism to Anglicanism. I sort of caught a vision of a wider and more generous home I think. I mean, I wouldn't have got that everywhere in the country. But you certainly did in Cambridge. And the music as well that was performed by the choirs.

Interviewer: When you say wider and more generous, what you mean by that?

Jim: Well, I think I experienced Methodism, however warm people were personally and on your side, it felt a quite small house to live in faith wise. There was nothing desperately wrong with it, but it felt restrictive. I suspect one of my motives was not particularly a good one because I saw that being a member of the Church of England was probably a little bit more exciting and might make for a more interesting ministry. That was my snobbishness coming out.

So, I did a switch anyway and was confirmed and put my name forward for ordination in that period. And fell hook, line and sinker from one of my fellow students in the college who didn't reciprocate in affection but did fitfully in lust, which just confused the hell out of both of us really, I think. It's so embarrassing looking back at those sorts of teenage, because nobody really... well, that's not true that there nobody to talk with. Hugh

Montefiore, does his name to you from the theological, ecclesiastical past? No. No reason why it should be. He was the Dean of my college and taught me, you know, he directed my studies in theology, but he was a very approachable human being. And he was very matter of fact when I went to talk to him about our sexuality and he put me on to one or two other people. And I think that's probably when I began to realise there might be more to be said about this than what I'd gleaned in my teenage years that perhaps the three baddies, bad words, criminal, immoral and neurotic, didn't necessarily hold. How could they have, you know, 4% of the population, which was a rough guess at that time.

And of course, the Wolfenden Report about changing the law about consensual sex in private, which meant be if you were in a bedroom in a house, it had to be behind a locked door for it to be not illegal. And so, it was a step in the right direction, but slightly minimal. I don't remember any court case based on that, but anyway. It was done with some reluctance. And that was, you see that wasn't passed until 1967, by which time I'd graduated and dallied a little. And had been over in Nigeria for a year with the Voluntary Service Overseas. Where I suspect I there could have been more sexual activity than I actually took part in because young Nigerian males wouldn't have thought twice about it as long as it was kept secret. And there was no question at that time about being public in any way. That was a long way in the future.

And there was another handsome American Peace Corps volunteer whom I did try and seduce but didn't get very far. And that so I didn't really have a great swinging time in the 60s, contrary to what lots of people think we did, we didn't, most of us.

[0:21:10]

Interviewer: That's interesting. I mean that obviously was a decade of great change. And I'm just curious as to what you think or where you think the change came from. I mean, what was the energy behind it? Why was this changing? You know, why was there a kind of partial, if you like, decriminalisation for homosexuality in 1967 and where did that come from?

Jim: I suspect the pot was bubbling away underneath the surface in the immediate postwar period. But it had to bubble over and find a voice. It doesn't quite work, does it, but you know what I mean. And for me it was That Was The Week That Was on television. It was satire, never seen satire, how daring. And seeing Beyond the Fringe before it even went to the Edinburgh Festival with a young Alan Bennett and Jonathan Miller and Peter Cook and Dudley Moore. I can just reel off the names to this day. And went with a bunch of friends to see that. And that again was a complete eyeopener. And as I say, there was this theological ferment going on.

I think the sexual stuff had to wait till the 70s because it was trailing behind, though it was quite clear that the rather severe no sex before marriage, don't go below the belt before the wedding night stuff was probably practised by more people than were pretending otherwise, but it was certainly a time when people were beginning to approach sex and relationships differently.

But I think it was the 70s, we had to wait for that to happen in any significant public way because that's when the organisation started. Not entirely. I mean, we owe a debt to people like Antony Grey and the North West Homosexual Law Reform Committee, which led up to the founding of the Campaign for Homosexual Equality. And then the sort of gay liberation stuff of the mid-70s of which LGCM was a part. GCM at first.

And so, I came back from Nigeria to theological college at Lincoln for training for ordination. And the church, of course, was as hopeless then as it is now in actually

trying to help people reconcile and live well, both a religious role in the community with an unusual sexual orientation. And nobody really quite knew how to cope with that. And I think the church moved pretty swiftly away from criminal and neurotic categories, but the moral one, of course, was the one where it stuck. But you know the more aware knew that a certain latitude had to be given which wouldn't have been given 20 years ago because it seemed as though something was afoot, which was rather different from casual sex by students when the opportunity arose. Something that was, you know, people began to realise I think that it was a much more important issue than, "Oh you'll grow out of it and you'll get married," which was the classic line at that time.

Interviewer: So, at what point did you then sort of start having a dialogue obviously with your family and with your parents about your sexuality?

Jim: Well, it wasn't with them that I had the conversations. It was in and around about 73, 72, 73, from Lincoln and then 74 I went back to my college in Cambridge as a college chaplain. And it was through going to meetings of the Campaign of Homosexual Equality, local ones, and then later in the decade when GCM got going it had quite an active network of local groups in its earlier years. And it was... oh, and a small organisation called Reach, I don't know whether you've heard of Reach? And I'm trying to - oh Dennis Nadin was the guy who had initiated it. But he wanted all power to himself and this clearly was going to be a movement where power was being shared. And so, and it was going to be much bigger than Reach and that's when GCM, that started in April, April 1976.

And I think a lot of us pretended, looking back, that we'd got it all sorted out for ourselves, but we were actually doing a lot of the sorting out through the politics rather than the personal, but they're seeing that the two are connected. But I think there was a lot of exploration going on, some good, some not so good. I think probably human beings, including myself, hurt and were hurt more than they would like to admit, but at the same time recognising that this was, you know, we were stumbling towards something. We weren't quite sure what we were stumbling towards. I don't think anybody could have dreamt of thinking of a phrase like gay marriage at that time, you know? And so, yeah, we made mistakes. Inevitably. But at the same time developed the arguments.

[0:27:54]

So, it was it that setting where I did my working out. And my coming out was with the launch of GCM. And there was a religious television series called Everyman in those days. And Peter Francis, Peter France, Peter France, I think, he wanted to do a programme on the issue and there was a Metropolitan Community Church guy, Troy Perry, founded that in the States, yeah, and had written a book, The Lord's My Shepherd and He Knows I'm Gay. And that was the title of the programme. And I was asked to appear on it, which I did, which was more of a change moment in my life than I probably realised at the time because it wasn't the most prudent career move in the Church of England in the mid-70s. It still wouldn't be in the in the mid-teens of, you know, 40 years on unfortunately.

But so that was a big moment of change for me and I was involved, I think I was like, a piece of paper's got it somewhere, for the first couple of years, I was their first honorary secretary of the movement before it got too big for, you know, as a volunteer thing to do. I was on the committee for much longer, quite a few more years, and had responsibility for the efforts we were trying to make in terms of befriending and counselling work.

And then my life moved on because I've never felt it to be, I never felt a kind of one issue person. And I did think seriously of applying for the job of what I think we called General Secretary at that time which would give me an income and I think I probably would have got it. But it was... no, I'll get sick on an empty stomach if I've just got this to talk and think about all day. That's not me.

So, I then followed. I never lost touch with the church. I've always been bona fide in whichever diocese I've lived, though not without controversy. You know, at times when I thought it was important to say something or do something. And that was fine once I did and I worked on counselling skills and became an accredited counsellor knowing so, I knew I could earn my keep if I needed to on that. But I was much more, I don't say freelance, but I would say I was much more free range probably from 1970. Certainly from, well not from 1977 because I still had two half time jobs, paid jobs in the Church of England in the Diocese of St Albans. Robert Runcie was the bishop then. And he was playing the absolutely typical English establishment game of you give me room to manoeuvre and I'll give you room to manoeuvre. And which I said, "Yes, I'll go along with that so far, but it doesn't resolve the questions". Which he had to agree it didn't. But it was a way of surviving for a bit longer.

And then I became more sort of free range in latter years until my very last appointment which was as police in charge of the parish of Aberdaron at the end of the peninsula here. So, actually, I did actually make vicar in the end. Just for three and half years.

Interviewer: So, just thinking about, you mentioned questions there on a personal level. How did you resolve or harmonise, if you like, your faith and your sexuality? And were there any particular questions or did it sort of just kind of fall into place for you and make sense?

Jim: Well, I guess there are two things. There's what do you learn through experience at first, which I learned a lot and became convinced that this was good. I couldn't see anything wrong. I think it took me longer to come back to the notion that most of us would like to find the person who is central to our lives for the rest of our lives, and I think I go along with that now. But that sometimes you have to make do with less than that.

I think once I'd come to a particular conclusion about sexuality as a whole, that was my way in. I thought I want to write some things about sexuality which cover the whole spectrum because I didn't feel that the relationships I was observing and one or two relationships I had seemed all that different from those of my heterosexual friends. And when, of course I realised that the first century had a very primitive view of the processes of reproduction and believed that the entire male human, new human being was contained in the male seed and the mother was there as the receptacle and the producer of the... but it was that the man had the complete. And that explains a whole lot of theology as well and gender divisions and roles. If that's your biology, that's what you're going to think. But once you realise it's half and half in terms of chromosomes etc, etc, etc, you then recognise that it's out of a relationship of two people. And it seemed to me that the two factors which are constant for any couple where it really works long-term is that you have a mutual attraction for each other which may start sexual and may continue sexual, it may broaden out into deep affection, it may bring a lifelong commitment. But that's one dynamic of two people being attracted to each other and growing through that attraction.

[0:34:55]

But there's the other is, that's the union, the other is the creativity it brings. And because so much of the conversations were about procreation and what was the moral context for bringing up children and all of that. I think, and I don't think it's sunk in totally yet, but once I'd seen it, I've never wavered from this and I've had this view for

30 years must be now easily that if I look at any relationship that's lasted and ask why is it working, and there may be sameness in terms of the genders or it may be difference in terms of the genders, but it's when each helps the other To be singly or mutually creative.

You know, I mean, the classic is a gay couple get together and they go off and run an antique shop or a bed and breakfast or whatever. And find themselves flourishing as human beings in a way they never had done nor ever were able to do alone. And so, my line is I'm very pro-creativity. And obviously the biological and social, political norm is bound to be heterosexual marriage, call it what you will, and the procreation and care for of children. That's what most people are going to go for. It doesn't seem to be lessening whether the conditions are particularly good at the moment, I don't know. Yeah. But lot is changing.

But because I'd witnessed that and experienced it myself in the gay context, I thought well, actually there isn't really anything deeply significant of difference here. And what we've got to look at is how we use power in our close relationships. That's the problem. Because if you think of the things that were easy to say no to, like violence, like rape, abuse of children or whatever, it's obvious, it's a misuse of adult power over against those who are not as strong or much younger and not ready. And that's just as common heterosexually as it is homosexually. And that's where I would, in those issues, that's where I would locate an ethic. And I've not seen anything that I think has advanced that position and I've not seen any critique which has knocked it for six where I'm concerned. So, that's what I hold to really and why I stopped writing about it some years ago. I've said all I've got to say really. And they're in the three books, Good Fruits, Quiverful. No, there and there were four. Pleasure, Pain and Passion and The Service of My Love which is a handbook for, well, I call it for blessings as civil partnerships. But that's got around quite a bit. So, the other contribution professionally was liturgical and pastoral.

Interviewer: So, by taking this kind of holistic view it makes sense and it's something that is acceptable and permissive before God?

Jim: And I think families and communities recognise it you see. I've done a number of weddings where my sense and clearly from a guessed sense is this is not going to work. But I'm legally bound to do it. And then gay blessings I've done where I've been pretty sure from the beginning that it was going to work. And instances the other way round. And so, again, it didn't feel to me to be any huge difference. What's it? I'm trying to remember his name. He's still with us. I think he's retired now. He was a chaplain and a psychotherapist at the Littlemore Hospital outside Oxford. Oh dear. They said it would get like this when you're 70. What's his name? I can't remember it at the moment. It may come back to me. Pop it in the subconscious for ten minutes. And he at one consultation of the endless consultations I've been at over the years, he made a very illuminating point. He said, "I think every good relationship is both heterosexual and homosexual". In this regard is that people need to have enough sameness in terms of what they recognise in each other, that their values, what their interests, whatever, enough ground based, make enough conversation possible, to put it, you know, lowest. But then when the relationship really is creative, there's always a spark of difference. And you couldn't see it. You would see it in elderly gay men who are still being bitchy with each other after 40 years like the programme on television recently. And they've become very comfortable as a kind of Darby and Joan couple which you would recognise amongst their acquaintance where a man and a woman who are in their 70s. And they've actually even grown to look like each other. Where there are others who sparkle and have gone off and gone in their different directions, but keep the friendship going where you feel that once the kids have left home, they've each discovered new paths and they've each helped the other in that exploration. Sometimes they've formally divorced, sometimes they've kept going. There's one couple I read of that kept August

completely through the diary for each other. And their primary relationship and they kept it going by Augusts because they were both busy with internal organisations. And that was the way that caused least frustration.

[0:41:52]

Interviewer: It's interesting, isn't it, that creativity is often created by tension.

Jim: Yeah. There's got to be some. But not too much. Again, you know, not too much sameness, not too much difference. Because then you do fall into all sorts of traps. No, it won't come to me. Never mind. Yeah.

Interviewer: So, you worked this out and integrated your faith and your sexuality through taking this view of how relationships, the quality of relationships and how they work. Being comfortable yourself and being reconciled is one thing, but how then do you move in the world around you and the attitudes of people towards you? And so on. Tell me a bit about that.

Jim: Well, you may get the opportunities to say things on radio or television or to somebody writing oral history, whatever, you know? If you've got the gift of the gab a bit and you're in public life. So, that's one way. And being on television. Oh, that's, by the way, when my parents had to know because and I wrote to quite a lot of people saying this will probably be interesting news at the very least. You might want to watch this programme on Sunday evening. And I only got two bad replies.

Interviewer: The Everyman?

Jim: Yes, and this is April 1976.

Interviewer: Right.

Jim: I think the kind of conversation that you can have sometimes with people, I'll give you one example of this, I was giving a talk at a clergy conference, Anglican, I think the Diocese of Gloucester at the conference centre at Swanwick in Derbyshire, some, a long time back now, years back. Oh, that was Mark Pryor. It wasn't about sexuality. But as I was doing publishing stuff at the time, I went everywhere with brown boxes in the back of the car and it was a very profitable evening actually that one. And somebody came up to me and said, "Oh, Good Fruits. Interesting. Oh, I'll buy this. I don't think I'll agree with it". And so, I said, "Oh, tell me why not". So, we started a fairly civilised conversation in this bookstore room and I began to be aware that people were coming in and listening in on it. And I thought, "I don't know who this character is, but he is obviously of some stature in the Diocese of Gloucester". Which immediately made me feel a bit nervous. But we talked fairly, as I say, and argued back and forth. And then other things are beginning to happen and people are beginning to drift away. Ad he said, trying to be as reconciling as possible, "I don't think we fall that far apart really". And I said, "Well, on this particular issue, we are considerably because for a start it affects the whole of my life, whereas it only affects part of your life as somebody who thinks it's an issue that has to be tackled. But you're not affected personally by it". And I said, "I know that if I had the influence and thought it worth the while, I would do my best to make sure you were not elected to the General Synod of the Church of England. And you would do your best to make sure that I was at least unfrocked and not excommunicated. If we each followed the logic of our arguments".

[0:46:05]

And I can hear the cheer from around silently as though, "Oh, thank goodness somebody's pointed it out to him at last of the lack of balance and things". And I still think to this day if you can have that kind of conversation, it doesn't really matter what the other person says to you. What does matter is how you handle what they say and those on the edge listening in, if you can keep your cool and also if you can tell something of your story and be a bit vulnerable, you'll win the day.

And I suppose I picked up various techniques and tactics over the years for conversations about these things without doing a great deal in public and certainly not in recent years. But I think, I mean that was just one way of making a contribution. And the writing of course was pertinent there and I know a lot of people read the stuff I wrote. And spoke at a number of conferences in those early years.

But in the end, as I say, I'm not a one issue person. I'm interested in far too many other things really. But the last occasion when I did anything public and got notoriety for it was when I was down at Vicar of Aberdaron and this is, it's a very interesting sequence this because this is only a few years ago, probably in 2009. It was my second church council meeting and I genuinely wanted to bring up an issue which I thought would, I needed to do it, but it also would test the water. And so, I put an item saying, introduced by the vicar, the remarriage of divorced couples in church. And I said this isn't something I want to bring to a vote this evening, but I would like your guidance in the degree of discretion you would give me in saying yes or no to a couple who were a second marriage.

Well, nobody seemed to have any trouble with that at all. The great thing about the rule there is everybody's got a skeleton in the cupboard. Either they brought it with them from the city or it's been in the chime's(?) cupboard for generations.

And then there's a former cop in the congregation, and I know he was testing me out because he said, "Well, if we're happy with that, what about the blessing of lesbian and gay relationships?" you see. And he was very interested in how I'd respond to that. And I said, "Well, you know my own position on this but it I did not think it was a position that was, the timing was right to raise it as a separate issue and genuinely tonight is about what discretion you give me. But is it something you want to talk about now or shall we put it on the agenda sometime? Or do you want to include it?" Because by this time the resolution was getting formed. "Do want do you want it to this resolution?"

And sufficient people did put it to the vote. And the whole package went through NEMCON(?) in a rural Anglican congregation in the last village before Ireland. I think I said it might cause a bit of bother, but I wasn't going to say I wouldn't do it. And I got the opportunity only a couple of months later, two women who had a cottage just outside the parish boundary, but one of whom had had childhood holidays in the area. And so, they kind of ticked the boxes of somebody who was close enough to the church, etc, etc. And so, I went ahead hoping it wouldn't leak which was a vain hope, of course. But I have to say it was certainly one of the happiest days of my ministry, well, of my life actually. And we'd actually been able to do this and a good number of the congregation came and there were about 80 people in the church, which made it fairly full.

And then it got it got leaked in a rather distorted way and because there was no bishop at the time, we were between bishops, the complaint went straight to the Archbishop of Wales, Barry Morgan, who's actually quite pro-gay and does a lot of work behind the scenes internationally. But when he has to bring in the rule book as a bishop, he's hopeless at managing it. He doesn't get it right. It was basically a rebuke and if you do it again, it would be a tribunal and he said that would be a pity. He said it would be a sad end to your ministry. And I forewarned didn't say that it actually would be a great, triumphant, marvellous end, in fact, because I wanted to keep all my cards to my chest

and I said, "Well, look, I know the game," and I think I used the word game, "I know what you've got to do and I don't think any the less of you for it. I knew I was sticking my neck out and it was against the rules. But I won't give you any indication whether if another couple come to me, how I will respond. I will treat that on its own merits if and when the time comes".

[0:52:28]

Well, nobody else did actually so since then. So, it all fell away. But I was on the radio for that and it was in the press and everything else. But there was no problem locally. You see the next day, well, what the landlord of one of the pubs said to me, "Was that a wedding yesterday?" But he was just curious, you see, because it obviously hadn't struck him as quite the norm and yet it felt like it. I said, "Well, not precisely. It was Helen and Lisa and they just have a legal ceremony as a civil partnership, and it was a blessing in the church". "Oh well, that explains it," he said. You know, and he was quite happy then.

And then I went into one of the other village shops with Sean, no Sian, Sian. I always get Sian and Sean mixed up. Sean. That's the girl's, woman's name, isn't it? Sean? Or is it Sian?

Interviewer: It's Sian.

Jim: Sian. I knew I'd get it wrong. Sian. Yeah, Sian. And she had rather pursed lips. And I knew she was sort of lapsed chapel. And I thought I wonder what's coming here. But actually, the only thing that she was a little annoyed was that she hadn't heard first, so, could spread the news before anybody else. It got to her rather late. And she was a bit miffed by that. She had no problem.

And that convinced me about, it goes back to one of the other things you asked, but about I think the more the issue can be about people and context and the way they live, it applies to many a rural area, but the people who come in from outside to Aberdaron who get on are those who give something to the life of the community. You know, and they get stuck in. And then if something controversial comes up, it's handled. If you keep yourself to yourself then well it's your own fault if it doesn't work out, really. And that's clear now in families, it's clear in neighbourhoods, it's clear in offices and banks and even the armed forces. And you know, whatever. That basically it's a non-issue.

Interviewer: It's interesting, isn't it, that when people see gay people, LGBTQ people as people rather than somehow creating a function out of them or an identity out of their sexuality or gender identity, it ceases to become an issue. And it's, I mean, just observing what's happening in places like Nigeria and so on, the very opposite is happening it seems there. But yeah, just an observation.

Jim: The countries in Africa that are having trouble are those who were evangelised by evangelical missionaries in the 19th century. So, that got into the law book. You know, Ghana's all right, South Africa's all right and parts of East Africa are but not others.

Interviewer: So, thinking about, you've talked very much about, or we've thought a bit about your background and growing up and your church background and early interests and university. And we've talked a bit about your story of coming out. Just thinking about the impact that your work has had on others and also why did you do this work? Why have you written? Why have you been a voice?

Jim: It's almost impossible to answer either of those questions. Word smithery, as it were, is my craft. And I suppose over the years I've concentrated on liturgical language and how

Christianity connects with various issues like sexuality, ministry, healing, depression and whatever. But again, being somebody who, I said to a friend the other day, I'm not going to finish all the projects I've got on the go now. There isn't time. But then I've come to terms of that because if I live to be 110, I would still have half a dozen unfinished projects. Because that's who I am. So, there's always been something on the go, more than one thing. And there's three or four, possibly four, manuscripts books or whatever lined up posthumously because there isn't time to publish any of them before I'm likely to, leukaemia is going to win at that level.

So, it just fell into place, the writing, and I suppose it was being asked to give addresses and talks and things and having a flair for that. And every clergyman is an actor manqué and it gives me the chance to be in the limelight and be a bit theatrical and try not to be too much over the top, too camp. That's not me either but...

[0:58:50]

So, that got fed and grew because of people hearing something is, "Oh Jim would be good. It sounds as though we were fixing up". So, that's been part of my, probably for the last 30 years, which has extended to going for 20 years of that. Every year, no, not quite every year, but most years went and spent a month either in the States or in Australia and New Zealand and those other kind of clientele and reputation there. So, and that was all kind of word of mouth stuff and sold the books. And because of the variety of things, you know, things about prayer, others about sex and ministry and, as I say, about depression and stuff, people could go and look at a bookstall and not feel too embarrassed because there was a range of stuff. So, it had a context. Yeah. And I certainly didn't, you know, was also in that period talking about all sorts of other things as well. About the sexuality stuff was quite often part of it.

Interviewer: It sounds to me that when you talk about a range of things, a range of topics, it very much, it's very much consistent with your understanding of sexuality as there being a range and therefore it's a, what's the word, it's kind of a normal part or an integrative part of being in the room if you like. And you're not defined by it.

Jim: Not defined and also that... my dad actually and he came to one or two of the AGMs of what was by then LGCM and listened to one or two of the addresses. And one was by John Boswell from the States on the history. And he spoke very fast and my father was a patient man but a slow thinker and I was, "Oh God, what's Dad thinking of this one?" And I wasn't sitting in the same place as he was in the room. And I said, "That was a bit fast, wasn't it, Dad?" And he said, "Very good though, wasn't it? Very good". You know? And so, yeah, and he'd got, he was in there and what helped him was meeting a variety of people including some Methodists from his background which helped you see.

And again, I suppose setting in context and making links and connections the whole time. And I suppose that's true of the impact generally. I find it very hard to quantify the effect though having acquired a terminal illness which was giving me, well, it's given me three years of life still. And now the letters that I'm getting from people show that the influence has been much wider than I ever thought it had been. Because as a writer, you know how many books have left your own office or a publisher's office, but that's the only facts you can get. It's almost impossible to get to know how many copies were sold, how many were remaindered, how many were pulped, how many were given as presents and opened and never looked at again. How many were dipped into. We don't know that. And if you are, and writing is a fairly solo business and you don't get the kind of feedback that you do if you're working with colleagues or you're in an office or in a parish or working in a factory or a garage mechanic or whatever of constant feedback from a limited circle. This is a scattered feedback which you occasionally hear about.

And I had a letter yesterday. No, an email yesterday from somebody I'd not seen for 20 years or so. And obviously from what he said earlier in his life, in two or three occasions, I was a great help to him. He's not gay, as it happens. But that's not particularly relevant. And you forget these things and now when I may have a few months left, it may be only a few weeks. It depends how this wretched cancer decides to polish me off and polish itself off at the same time. Ha! The only way a cancer dies is if it takes you with it. It sounds a very curious thing.

But yeah, you know, so somebody said, "Have you have you got anything arranged as a memorial service?" I said, "Oh there's going to be a funeral, but I don't know". So, I kind of said to a number of other friends who know me well, "This has been suggested. I don't kind of think a great deal". "Oh yes, you must, there'll be lots of people want to come". And I found that very difficult to believe you see. So, I've handed it over to other people, it's not my affair. As long as there's certain things they don't do, I'm quite happy. And the main thing is they must not push me in on a trolley. They must be carried or I must be carried on shoulders. I hate trolleys at funerals. So, I said that's the only way. If you do that, I shall haunt you. Otherwise, you know, do it for what you need sort of thing.

But it was this sense of the stuff has got around and touched more lives than I thought it had because people are reluctant to write and these things, especially when they come up to you personally.

[1:05:10]

Interviewer: The interesting thing I think about writing is that you write something, the book does go to somebody, they may read it, or they may put in on bookshelf, but somebody else may pick it up at times later and read it. They assimilate your words, your ideas, your sentiments And then that's given out to somebody else.

Jim: And people can so easily get out of print stuff now through Amazon and AbeBooks. There's even two or three booklets of mine, of addresses I gave on AbeBooks. You know? And there are one or two of the books which are at a suspendedly high price, though I shan't see any of that, but never mind. You know? Others for a penny. So, I have to say that, plus postage. So, I recognise the importance of the area you're asking about. I think it's very important because it's how networks develop and people communicate. But a lot of it is so difficult to assess because a lot of it is actually happening by word of mouth and people conversing together in cafés and pubs and at work and in churches and you know? And that's, of course, how the climate changes sufficiently. But in the end, the lawmakers to catch up, you know. And in in our culture, the Parliament catches up usually before the Church of England for the last body. It'll get there, but I won't see that, but it'll get there.

Interviewer: It's interesting you should say that because I've always had this idea that often it's the law that changes and then social attitudes catch up with the law.

Jim: I think the one feeds the other actually. But I think that, and I would agree that, for example, on race relations, when certain attitudes, behaviours were deemed unacceptable publicly, it didn't stop people being racist, but it stopped other people getting hurt. And to that extent, there's a parallel, I think, with the sexual issues. But under that cover a new generation then grows up who actually sees that the changes of the law haven't gone far enough. But there is a momentum behind it then because nobody now in our society, unless they're totally unobservant, can say they don't know half a dozen gay couples, for example, lesbian, in their family, at their church, at their place of work. And for most people, it's what's the fuss about? Which is actually an enormous shift from a schoolboy or a student whenever I was furtively in Manchester

Central Library reading Against the Law, not available on the open shelves. And that's only 50 years ago. So, things have changed quite rapidly.

Interviewer: How do you see it progressing?

Jim: I think there are a number of issues that are around at the moment that are fronts for other issues. I don't think it's gay marriage that's the problem. It's marriage that's the problem because we're very uncertain what meaning to give to it now in a very diverse society, both in terms culturally and religiously. I think at the moment the Church of England is so nervous about getting women bishops wrong again that they don't want anything other that's controversial. Until that's sorted. But that's all about, that's not especially about women. It's about what do we need bishops for? And of course, bishops don't like trying to answer that question.

And by extension, what are clergy for? You see, so institutions don't like those questions. So, you'll find a relatively easy taboo which still operates in a stigmatising way to deflect attention away from the bigger issues where there is a huge amount of controversy and it again it comes down to the use of power. And the Roman Catholic Church is experiencing a rather extraordinary change of atmosphere where the Pope understands power but uses it in a very different way. Couldn't be more streetwise I don't think then he, certainly no academic Benedict. Benedict couldn't handle the politics. He couldn't, he wasn't streetwise enough. Like Rowan Williams.

Yeah. So, who knows? I think a lot's got to worked through yet in terms of where the boundaries of behaviour are. It's quite clear that the Catholic Church particularly, although it's improving little by little, has not yet done enough on the abuse issue. And that's about power of course. It's not really not really about sex. Though of course it damages people's ability to love and be loved intimately.

[1:11:18]

And so, I think those are the things that are knotty problems which I don't see how any of them, how they will be resolved. But I do see our approach changing which is we somehow have to learn to live together with a considerable amount of difference and diversity, but is that a bad thing? And I remember, well, I was in Aberdaron being interviewed by Sally Magnusson for Songs of Praise, which they did down the pilgrim route you see. And I'd forgotten I'd said this, but somebody who had seen the programme recently rebroadcast in Australia wrote to me and said, "I'm so glad you said this," and it was just right for me to hear back after half a dozen years, which was I think I was asked what does faith mean to you? And I said, "Well, it's learning to live with the unresolved and pray for grace". You know, because the older I get and I feel less and less certain about more and more. And I can't resolve the paradoxes of birth and death. Every time I try and think of what an afterlife might be like I collapse in hysterics. But I can't entirely let go of the belief in it. I think the evidence is far too strong now. And I'd say that if I were a scientist. That's another track. But that's of interest to me at the moment, of course.

Yes, I probably need to shut up for my health's sake. I could natter on for ages as you can imagine, but is that, have you got what you hoped for?

Interviewer: Yes.

Jim: Good. As long as you got that, that's fine.

[End of Transcript]