

A Reflection for 16th May 2021 (Seventh Sunday of Easter)

By Edwina Miller, Parish Nurse

Change is happening all around us, the easing of lockdown means the guidelines on what we can do or expect to be the new normal will change again. Change can challenge our beliefs and our faith.

All through the Bible we hear about how situations changed and people had to adapt their way of living to cope with them. This is nothing new for humanity.

In our first Bible reading from the Acts of the Apostles we hear of one of the ways that the disciples had to face change. They needed to elect another to take the place of Judas the betrayer; the lot fell to Matthias and the group had to change and cope with what that meant for them.

In our second reading from St John's gospel Jesus is preparing his disciples for when they were to go it alone. Jesus is praying to his father in heaven that they be protected from the evil one. Jesus knows that the world is a dangerous place for them; they have received the word and accepted it. They live in the world and will try to live out the gospel message and continue the ministry Jesus has prepared them for. But he knows they will face conflicts, opposition and even death. This is scary, Jesus prayer is to encourage and strengthen them and all who come after them, as they face new and different situations. Today as followers of the way, we have the strength of that prayer surrounding us, protecting us from evil and helping us to cope with whatever life throws at us.

Evil can be a difficult concept for us to think about.

It is possible that our perception of evil may be an individual experience including being in a bad place concerning health and wellbeing in body, mind or spirit. Certainly the threat of the Covid 19 has felt like a very present evil to many people.

Recognising the challenge to humanity we are experiencing, the World Health Organisation (known as WHO) said "2020 hasn't exactly turned

out as everyone was expecting it to thanks to the pandemic, for this reason we will extend the Year of the Nurse and Midwife into 2021.”

International Nurses Day is celebrated on 12th May every year on the anniversary of the birth of Florence Nightingale.

Florence felt her calling, against all odds was to become a Nurse and a social reformer. She founded a school of nursing at St Thomas’ in London, and would go on to shape healthcare around the world for the next two centuries. The importance of good healthcare is recognised across the globe.

This year International Nurses Day was to acknowledged the crucial role Nurses play in ensuring patient safety and leading high quality care. The day’s focus was on “A vision for future healthcare”

As a Nurse I am interested in what health care might look like in the future and what changes will our future visionaries make?

We are told that social care must change to meet the needs of society today, no longer can the NHS meet every need but must rely on collaboration with other groups, professional, charitable and voluntary.

Lord Nigel Crisp, former Chief Executive of the English NHS, has recently written a new book entitled *Health, is Made At Home, Hospitals are for Repairs: Building a Healthy and Health-Creating Society*.

Lord Crisp refocuses the conversation regarding the NHS and places the responsibility on us to create a healthy society. The message is particularly timely and poignant in light of the current Covid-19. As he reminds us, the NHS ‘can only react, doing the repairs’, but it is up to us to tackle the underlying causes in our workplaces, communities and at home in order to relieve pressure on the health service. Only then will it always be there for all who need it.

Covid 19 has revealed many uncomfortable truths about our society - our dependence on the people who do the lowest paid and most insecure jobs, poverty, poor housing, the vulnerability of many children and the way different ethnic groups have been affected.

It has also shown to us all how important good employment, housing and education are for our health and wellbeing. And what a vital role our communities play. Our wellbeing is intimately linked to the health of our communities and wider society in general.

Lord Crisp says “it’s time to change the way we view health. It’s not all about hospitals and the NHS, or about government policy, important as these are. It’s about us and our behaviour and our society.

There will still be a vital role for us when this pandemic is over, because the NHS can’t by itself deal with many of today’s major health problems such as loneliness, stress, obesity, poverty and addictions. It can only react, doing the repairs but not dealing with the underlying causes.

This reminds me of the riverbank analogy that tells us the story of the rescuer pulling some people out of the river, and giving first aid – but too busy to go round the bend in the river to see who is pushing them in!

Nurses are in a unique position to lead the conversations about what is being called the “social prescription”, because they are in touch with the people who need support other than from the hospital. They can network with voluntary and statutory agencies and encourage collaboration. There are many local initiatives known to each of you and supported by many of us. They are not just preventing disease but creating good health.

I was saddened that Lord Crisp paid scant attention to faith based health creation as I believe that the church, in its members, has always been present from the earliest days, caring for the community in which it finds itself. Maybe we need to shout louder about what we do.

At St Botolph’s we too are supporting a health ministry in our Parish Nursing initiative. This has been going now for five years. Over this time we have emphasized the need to care for our community in body, mind and spirit, as Christians working pastorally. Over the next two years we must change and adapt, looking for new people to join us in our mission, and joining in with local groups as we experienced with our Health Fair.

We live in a society that wants instant reaction; I suggest that it takes time and reflection to create lasting change. As Christians we are called to pray and study, allowing God to speak into our action.

Our project at St Botolph’s has recently used the strap line, “Honouring our past, looking to our future”, and we know that this involves change.

For some change is painful and for others exciting. Like the disciples we are called to be in the world and work for the good of all, whilst remembering the pioneers of the past, like Florence Nightingale.

If we left things as they were, with systems not fit for purpose, things not as good as they could be, not serving the needs of people, then that would be negligent and we would not be living out our calling to love one another as God loves us.

But one thing we can rely on is that during all this change we have the sure hope that Jesus, risen and ascended, continues to pray and guide us. In this is our strength and confidence to face the future.

Amen