

Talk on 18th October 2020 by Edwina Miller, Parish Nurse and Lay Pastoral Minister

Luke 10:1-9

Today we celebrate the feast of St Luke the evangelist. Luke was a native of Antioch in Syria. He was thought to be a Greek and so a Gentile and by profession a physician. He was also an apostle called by Jesus and a companion of St Paul.

Last week was Parish Nursing Sunday when we give thanks for all the Parish Nurses that have been called to lead a health ministry team in churches of all denominations across the UK.

At St Botolphs we are linking the two celebrations together today. I would like this morning to add another celebration and that is the life and work of Florence Nightingale, whose bicentenary it is this year.

In our gospel reading, Luke tells us of Jesus sending out the 70 people ahead of Him to all the towns and villages that he would be visiting. He gave them specific instructions on what to take with them and to tell them not to be diverted. They were to heal the sick and tell those who would hear that the Kingdom of God had come near to them.

We find ourselves living through extraordinary and demanding times, where things suddenly seem unpredictable, unstable, confusing and very insecure.

We have had to become used to lockdown or restricted movement and gatherings. Life for us had suddenly taken on a precariousness and fragility that perhaps our ancestors would identify with. When we look back on their history, previous generations had to overcome plagues, famine and wars, poor sanitation, illness and deprivation.

The pandemic has affected all of us in ways we did not expect. How can we as a church on a mission reach out? And for Parish Nursing, what will our ministry look like in the coming months and years. I suggest this ministry has never been more important.

These times have reminded us of the Biblical importance of caring for the poor, the lonely and vulnerable people in our society. The Bible tells us of many healing miracles, the lame man at the gate, the blind man who receives his sight, who calls out to Jesus in his vulnerability, "Jesus Son of David have mercy on me". He receives both physical and spiritual healing, because he can see what those who are sighted cannot.

Many families known to us will now have a need for bereavement care or long term support towards recovery. We can all offer a ministry of compassion and listening.

The broadcasting and streaming services and other online work have connected us with people who have not been attending church, but may be on a faith journey. Be prepared to tell them your story of coming to faith.

I believe the pandemic has emphasized the need for spiritual care alongside physical and mental health. It has highlighted the need for faith communities to be alert to health risks.

It has helped us to recognise the value that nurses and other health professionals bring to our lives.

A parish nurse as part of the ministry team adds a fuller dimension to the pastoral care of our church and community. However, all are called to go out and help people to live out the calling that Jesus came to bring.

One such example of someone who responded to God's call was Florence Nightingale. There was an article in the church times on 29th May about a new stained glass window to be installed in the St George's Chapel in Romsey Abbey.

The artist Sophie Hacker has created "The Calling Window" which depicts the moment the founder of modern nursing said she was called by God.

Her contribution in improving nursing techniques, including upgrading hygiene practices, has been recognised during the pandemic with emergency hospitals named after her being set up to deal with coronavirus patients.

The window reflects a historical event in Nightingale's life, at the age of sixteen, when she received a clear 'call' from God.

Nightingale is seated on a stone bench in the grounds of Embley Park, turning towards a bright light breaking in between the twin trunks of a cedar tree. Four words emerge, 'Lo, it is I'. For Nightingale, these words summed up the essence of Christian faith, as Christ rises above the chaos of the world, walking on troubled waters, bringing consolation and peace. The light radiates outwards, in the shape of the cross, the symbol of Jesus death and resurrection.

For Nightingale, Good Friday represented the most important day of the Christian year, reflecting her life-long choice to place sacrifice and service above all things.

The window further depicts snowdrops, symbolising those, it is said, that a soldier brought back from the Crimea. The words at the base in Nightingale's own handwriting are: "Here I am Lord, send me."

She wrote in her diary as she approached her 17th birthday in 1837 that “God spoke to me and called me to His service”.

Sophie Hacker, started her commission two years ago. It was due to be installed in May but has been postponed until 2021 due to the pandemic. Sophie said: “I could never have anticipated that with the outbreak of the global pandemic how significant the role of the type of nursing that Nightingale instigated would be”.

I believe that Florence was called and given a specific task that would reach out through the generations

Our task as people called by Jesus is to recognise the signs of the Kingdom all around us. I wonder did those 70 people in the gospel reading come back with praise and joy when they saw those who were healed, and did those living in the towns and villages wait in anticipation of Jesus coming, or run to meet him. Do we recognise those signs all around us in our own lives today and will we go out and tell others that Jesus says, “The Kingdom has come near to you?”

Amen