

Clinical Director: Suzanne Hyde: Sermon, Sunday 21st October 2018

Thank you Father Stephen for inviting me to preach today. I have been Clinical Director of the Healing and Counselling service [down in the crypt] for just over two years now and it has been a whirlwind of activity and growth. One of the most exciting things about the Centre is that it offers in-depth help to people who are in pain and suffering from all sorts of mental challenges – anxiety, depression, suicidal thoughts, eating disorders etc. We see people from all walks of life and Religion or none –some highly successful outwardly, but inwardly feeling impoverished and desperate. Or people who have never quite been able to launch into life in any meaningful way and others who have sustained often devastating traumas.

The Healing and Counselling centre has a unique position in that whilst the healing service once a month and the mid-week communion all offer opportunities for the laying on of hands and speaking God's healing into and over people's lives, simultaneously, we also know that we are instructed to 'work out' our salvation - to use our talents, and contribute to our own growth. And it is this combination of healing and counselling that the centre represents. We see in the Gospels that Jesus did miracles, healed people instantaneously, even raising them from the dead. But he also gave instructions, imparted wisdom and told parables to help people to live more

whole and purposeful lives. ' I have come to give you life and life more abundantly' he exclaims. [John 10.10]

Although we all may know that occasionally miracles and healing can happen, however in this short time that I have to speak to you today – I wanted to draw attention to the 'miracle' of *ordinary* healing and wholeness [which actually is quite extraordinary and miraculous in itself]. When we have a physical injury or illness, we may indeed need the intervention of a doctor, but also the body innately knows what to do – it sends white blood cells to the site of injury and puts its energy into repairing the damage. In a similar way when we suffer traumatic, emotionally painful and distressing events – whether from external incidents, or internal unhelpful beliefs often created in childhood, I believe - as the psychologist Carl Jung proposed, that the psyche, much like the body gets to work trying to repair the damage – seeking to restore equilibrium and reaching towards wholeness. Sometimes we might need the support and help of doctors and therapists/counsellors/mental health services [which statistically up to 1 in 3 people will need over their life time], but there are also many helpful Biblical principles which can aid our healing journey and contribute to building a more conscious and robust psychological capacity within us. A way of thinking about this is when we plant a seed/bulb, it is a miracle [particularly if I've planted it], that it starts to grow and turn from a

kernel into a beautiful plant. However, we also have to nurture the plant, protect it from frost and storms. Similarly, we have to nurture ourselves and be protective of our own development.

I would like to focus on two pieces of Scripture that capture this principle.

1 Firstly

A powerful verse from Hebrews [who scholars think may have been written by St Luke] – the writer says: Hebrew 12 v 13

*‘Therefore, lift your drooping hands and strengthen your weak knees and **make straight paths** for your feet, so that what is **lame may not be put out of joint but rather be healed.**’*

I often use this verse – or a paraphrase of it – to encourage people that when they have an injury/hurt/upset, that whilst we are not in always in control of what happens to us – bereavement, illness, redundancy. We, however, can ‘make it worse’ or exacerbate the injury. Over my 18 years working as a therapist, I have noticed a pattern in a lot of my patients. Many have sustained deep injuries from childhood or other traumas – real injuries – painful rejections and abuse – and I have deep empathy with their pain. However, I also notice that often people make things worse [in fact I’ve done this myself] – so that the injury rather than allowed to heal and recover – gets worse. I

often say to them, if you have a broken leg you see the doctor they attend to the injury, but then you have to rest and make sure you don't do things that will undo the help that has been given. The innate healing processes in the body will do the rest – but if you decide to veer off the straight path and climb a mountain or cover rough terrain you are going to make the injury – as the verse above says, potentially irreversible [psychologists and psychoanalysts have spent years trying to explain this phenomenon of sabotaging our own healing.] Yes, some wounds leave terrible scarring and we may be left with a vulnerability in a particular area. But the wisdom of scripture is 'keep it clean' – make straight paths, give yourself, your body and your spirit the best chance to heal and recover.

The Second piece of wisdom comes from an interesting dialogue between Jesus and St Peter, just before the ascension. Jesus is telling Peter what is going to happen to him and what his path ahead is going to be.

[in John 21, v 23] 'Truly I say unto you when you were young, you girded yourself and walked where you would; but when you are old, you will stretch out your hands, and another will guide you and carry you where you do not wish to go. [this he said to show by what death he was to glorify god.] And after this he said to him "follow me."'

However, the very interesting – and often over-looked part of this vignette, is when the ever so human Peter, turns to Jesus and exclaims, looking at John *‘Lord what about this man?’* Jesus replies: *‘If it is my will that he remain until I come, WHAT IS THAT TO YOU, YOU FOLLOW ME’*. Those five words: *what is that to you?* Are a powerful instruction from Jesus. He is basically saying *‘mind your own business, focus on what **your** path is.’*

One of the biggest problems in our Society and a key contributor to mental health issues is comparing ourselves to other people. Facebook and other Social media have exacerbated this with the *‘look at my marvellous life’* pictures [and rarely showing the difficult issues.] However, we can also see in Biblical times that they weren’t immune to competition and curiosity about what other people were doing: who was better? has a more important role etc. But Jesus is very **clear** *‘what is that to you – you follow YOUR PATH – the one that is meant for you.’* I call it *‘getting busy’* by being distracted by the *‘it’s not fair, how come they have...a better education, more money, a good job?’*

Rather, we are called to focus on the work that **we** need to do, regardless of what anyone else is doing. It requires discipline but it also brings freedom.

So to summarise whilst not wanting to underestimate the hard work that can be involved in healing – whether physical or mental, and the complexity of the world we currently live in with all its demands and very real traumas, I hope

these two nuggets that I have shared with you from Scripture, might be helpful to you. St Luke, as we know was a doctor and his name means the bringer of 'light'. He attended to people's physical needs but also shed light and counsel on their psychological and spiritual needs.

We need to make straight paths for our feet and wise choices, so that the healing that is available can unfold. We need to co-operate with the healing processes.

We also have to resist being distracted or pre-occupied by other people's journeys and experience, we are clearly told to follow the path that we are on and make the most of it. In fact Jung helpfully points out [and I have this quote on my kitchen backboard to remind me] that *'if the path ahead of you is clear you are probably on someone else's path!'*

A small story to conclude, on Friday I was having lunch with a colleague from the Centre. She shared with me a story of St Marylebone church that many of you may know, but I actually didn't. She told me that in the war, all the stained glass windows in the church were blown out and destroyed. However, the windows, although they couldn't be re-constructed as they were, the pieces were gathered together and made into the windows we see today. I came into the Church afterwards and stood looking at the beautiful windows and was reminded again of how even shattered things can be restored. With the vision

of a good architect, hard work and patience, something new and beautiful can be created. They may not be as they were before, but with effort, skill, faith and hope, shattered pieces and lives can be rebuilt and transformed.