

Health and Healing

This last week a couple of events took place in Belgium to commemorate the one hundredth anniversary of the battle of Passchendaele. That battle accounted for one of the worst losses of life on both sides in the First World War. Very many more were injured. Those who survived were often scarred for life, if not physically then mentally.

Some of the most moving testimonies that were read out were of those who cared for the injured and dying. They showed genuine compassion for those in their care. Some of the injured survived. Sadly others could not be saved, despite the efforts of the medical personnel. So near to the battle zone those who cared for the injured put their own lives at risk but their task in hand took priority.

One of the cruellest acts in any conflict is surely the targeting of hospitals. We continue to see that in places such as Syria today. As if those who are ill or injured do not have enough to contend with, to be subjected to further attacks is horrendous. And the medical personnel who devote themselves to the care of others deserve far better.

Health and well-being are outcomes of peace, but they are also a prerequisite for real peace and reconciliation. That is reflected in the Bible reading we heard just now (Luke 9.1-6). The proclamation of kingdom of God – the kingdom of love in which humanity is reconciled to God and to one another – that proclamation goes hand in hand with healing. Mind, body and spirit are part of a whole and all need healing. Our Lord's commission to his disciples to preach and to heal is a mirror of his own earthly ministry.

That commission is addressed to us too as Christians. To proclaim the message of peace involves care and compassion for others. Commitment to God's will should be borne out in our concern for our world, and particularly for those who suffer. Of course we do not all possess the skills of doctors, nurses and counsellors, but we can still show kindness and genuine interest in the encounters with others in our daily lives.

Much is said about the problems of our own National Health Service. But in my limited experience we should give thanks for the true devotion and genuine vocation of those who work in it and give of their best. We also should give thanks and pray for those who work in areas of conflict and danger, who bring a light of humanity and compassion into what are otherwise cruel and harrowing situations. We give thanks for their courage and devotion.

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