

**Sermon/ Talk 5 July 20 by Revd Kathryn Waite
(Sirach 38:1-4 and Matthew 8:1-4)**



I wonder if you can you work out the link between these two plants...it is quite tricky, but it is related to healthcare... I know there are lots of keen gardeners and horticulturalists at St Andrew's and you may well have recognised them both. The first a yew tree, the Pacific Yew tree to be exact *Taxus Brevifolia* and the second one is a periwinkle. And the link is that chemotherapy drugs are

derived from both of these plants – Taxanes from the Yew and vinka alkaloids from the periwinkle, which are used to treat a number of different cancers. Other drugs are also derived from plants, such as digitalis a heart drug which is derived from the foxglove and willow trees which contain the substance that aspirin comes from were used several thousand year ago by Egyptians as a medicine. The writer of our first reading probably knew about such medicines. He was telling the people that medicines are God given, they are part of God's creation and should be used if they are needed.

This particular passage helped me a lot when I was wrestling with how my deepening faith fitted with my role as a doctor. If you work in the NHS it is often quite difficult to talk about faith – you are not allowed to offer to pray for people but of course I regularly prayed for my patients – they just didn't know that I did! The writer of Ecclesiasticus says that prayer plays a part in healing. He also says that physicians and pharmacists– to which I would add, nurses, physios, occupational therapist and all the many other health care professionals, and people who work within the NHS, are given their gifts by God and should be respected. We are all given different gifts and talents by God, and those involved in health care use their wisdom, experience and knowledge to make a diagnosis and to find the best way of looking after and treating each patient. In this way they help others, day in and day out and of course we shouldn't forget those involved in medical research in labs – we can't help but think of those working to find a vaccine for COVID-19.

But as well as using their skills and knowledge, health care professionals act with compassion as they care for their patients. The last few months has been extraordinarily difficult as we have heard from Grace. Sadly, far too many people have died, surrounded not by their loved ones but by doctors and nurses wearing full PPE, only able to touch the patient though a gloved hand. Touching others, especially the sick is so important. We all have a human need to know that we are cared for and touch is an important part of that. In our gospel reading, Jesus stretched out his hand and he touched the leper who had come to him and asked to be healed.

But Teresa of Avila said:

'Christ has no body now but yours. No hands, no feet on earth but yours. Yours are the eyes through which he looks compassion on this world.'

We are all called to be Jesus' hands and feet on earth, to do his work and to be compassionate. Even in PPE and wearing gloves on their hands, those who have cared and stretched out their hands to the sick, were, I think stretching out Christ's hand – even though they may not have been aware that they were.

During lockdown we have clapped our keyworkers – absolutely rightly, but all those who work in the NHS and healthcare frequently go above and beyond the call of duty in their working lives, caring for others in very difficult and pressurised situations; they always have done, well before the pandemic started, and in the months to come despite many being completely exhausted they are now faced with trying to work through long waiting lists of patients, whilst being aware that there may be another surge of coronavirus at any time. This weekend we are celebrating and giving thanks for the NHS but as life slowly becomes the new normal, we should not forget the courage and dedication of those who continue to work in the NHS in hospitals, in the community and in care homes.

I want to finish with a poem written several years ago by Michael Rosen who you might have heard on Radio 4 this week who himself had Coronavirus – it speaks of the hands, the hands that have cared, the hands of those who have been Christ to others in so many different ways...

These are the hands by Michael Rosen

These are the hands
That touch us first
Feel your head
Find the pulse
And make your bed.
These are the hands
That tap your back
Test the skin
Hold your arm
Wheel the bin
Change the bulb
Fix the drip
Pour the jug
Replace your hip.

These are the hands
That fill the bath
Mop the floor
Flick the switch
Soothe the sore
Burn the swabs
Give us a jab
Throw out sharps
Design the lab.

And these are the hands
That stop the leaks
Empty the pan
Wipe the pipes
Carry the can
Clamp the veins
Make the cast
Log the dose
And touch us last.