

The Faithzone : HEALING

This PDF version contains all the material relating to this section of the Video formatted for easy printing and comprising:

- Summary
- Transcript
- All questions/activities listed together
- Each question/activity listed on a separate page with pointers for discussion
- A collective worship

Summary

Presenter: Ruth McCabe, Manager, Milestone House HIV and AIDS hospice.

Jesus as healer – an inspiration.

The story of Reher: medieval jester and monk, founder of St Bartholomew's Hospital London.

Christian symbols in medicine: nursing sisters, chaplains and St John Ambulance.

Pioneering the hospice movement.

Developing the hospice environment: a safe place for all.

Providing unconditional love and support.

Discussion

What do you think are the characteristics of good physical and spiritual healthcare?

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Transcript

My name is Ruth McCabe. I'm manager of Milestone House, which is an HIV and AIDS hospice in Edinburgh. I am a Christian and I find the way that Jesus cares for people inspires me in what I do.

Here in this hospice, I try to follow his example by creating a safe place where people of all backgrounds can be cared for in both a physical and a spiritual way. But what goes on here is nothing new. Jesus's example of healing has motivated Christians to care for others for many centuries.

Just how many is reflected in this ancient document. It's a grant, drawn up by monk called Reher to raise money for a hospital he founded back in 1123. Today, Reher's shrine is in the church of St Bartholomew the Great in London. But he hadn't always lived a religious life. Before becoming a monk he was a jester in the court of Henry 1. When he became a monk, though, he went on a pilgrimage to Rome, and on the way he became seriously ill. Turning to prayer, he vowed that if he was healed he would go back to England and found a hospital for the welfare of others.

He did recover, and when he got home he founded this monastery to care for the poor and sick of London. He named it after the saint to whom he accredited his recovery, St Bartholomew. This place of prayer soon became known as a place of healing and St Bart's, as it's better known today, has been providing health care for the people of London for over eight hundred years.

But while St Bart's may be one of the earliest reminders of Christianity's influence on our health services, it's far from the only one. There are lots of other symbols revealing its Christian roots. The Charge Nurses you will find on any ward today were until recently called 'Sisters', a title reflecting the work of the nuns who often acted as nurses in the monasteries. In every modern hospital and hospice you will still find spiritual care available, now provided by Chaplains, paid for by the NHS and available to patients of every faith.

And even outside the hospital the signs are still there, especially in St John Ambulance whose roots go back to an order of knights founded in the twelfth century to protect pilgrims and care for the sick.

More recently, individual Christians have influenced healthcare – people like Dame Cicely Saunders who pioneered the modern hospice movement, where the combination of physical and spiritual care that Reher would have known has re-emerged.

But Reher's grant reminds me of even more than that. I believe that however, and wherever people are cared for, in hospital, in a hospice or at home, we need to pay attention to their heads, their hearts and their spirits. We need to see them as individual and special people and, just like Jesus, to provide them with unconditional love and support.

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Activities

1. What is 'Health'?
2. What is meant by 'spiritual health'? What is the difference between spiritual and physical health? How might they be related?
3. Why did Jesus heal people?
4. Christians believe that Jesus continues to heal people today. What do they mean by this? What examples might they give?
5. Why are many Christians antagonistic to / reluctant to accept ideas of euthanasia/abortion? Why do others believe that they are acceptable in certain situations?
6. In the Middle Ages, people's health was threatened by starvation, infant mortality and diseases such as leprosy and bubonic plague. What are the health challenges today? To what extent does our society itself cause these problems?

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Activity 1

What is 'Health'?

Ask students to write their own definition of the term. The often-quoted World Health Organisation definition is: *Health is a state of complete physical, mental and social well-being and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity.* This definition was written for the Preamble to the Constitution of the World Health Organisation as adopted by the International Health Conference, New York in 1946, signed by representatives of 61 states and entered into force two years later. It has not been amended since 1948.

- Talk and share ideas about the concept of Health by writing a 'prescription' for a healthy life – either for an individual or for the planet as a whole. The ingredients of this prescription needn't be too solemn!

Extension

How far can any individual or group protect the health of another? Think of examples where help is possible and others where it may not be possible. For many Christians, the body is seen as the 'temple of the spirit', a gift from God. What implications could such a view have for lifestyle choices?

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Activity 2

What is meant by 'spiritual health'? What is the difference between spiritual and physical health? How might they be related?

The idea that the whole person – body and spirit – needs to figure in any therapy recurs throughout the video. This idea has become very popular and is perhaps partly responsible for the increasing interest in 'alternative' medicines. However, the potentially unhealthy aspect of this attitude is that sometimes unwell people feel they should blame themselves for what are in fact unavoidable illnesses.

The need for spiritual health could be talked about and reflected on by asking the pupils to write a script for a school assembly. Base it on one of the many TV hospital drama programmes – only in this case the patients who are rushed in for emergency treatment are suffering from 'spiritual' illnesses – anger, sloth, greed... suitable symptoms can be created for each illness (e.g. red face, high pulse, sweating etc for anger) and great play made of detecting such problems with high-tech wizardry. In the end, though, the point is emphasized that these are intangible problems. What medicine can the student suggest for each case?

Extension (for advanced discussion)

Would you prefer to be spiritually healthy and physically unhealthy, or physically healthy and spiritually unhealthy?

What do students understand by the concept of 'sin'. How far could it be seen as the opposite of spiritual health? Discussion could include the idea of a situation that divides the individual from God, or things that are good, by a choice or action that is bad for spiritual health.

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Activity 3

Why did Jesus heal people?

Divide students into groups to look at some of the healing miracles. Examples might include:

- The healing of Bartimaeus (Mark 10:46-52)
- The healing of the paralytic (Matthew 9:1-8)
- The healing of the demon-possessed man (Mark 5:1-20)
- The healing of the sick woman and Jairus's daughter (Mark 5:21-43)
- The healing of the blind man (John 9)

Ask the students to analyse the incidents from two perspectives

1. What happened?
 - a. Can they put a name to the physical problems suffered in these stories?
 - b. What did Jesus do?
 - c. Have they any explanation for what happened?
2. Look at the stories from the perspective of 'what was going on' – the 'meaning' of the story. Most biblical scholars would see the miracles as emphasizing the breaking in of the Kingdom of God into present reality, but there are often more particular points being made.

Extension

Some people's idea of Jesus includes a view of him as a miracle worker, or one whose life was surrounded by various miracles and supernatural events. Other views would see the miracles, and anything else apparently miraculous about Jesus' life and work, as stories which help people to understand what Jesus and the Kingdom of God are like. Discuss both points of view. If there were positive proof that the miracles never took place, should that be a reason for Christians to stop believing in Jesus?

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Activity 4

Christians believe that Jesus continues to heal people today. What do they mean by this? What examples might they give?

As the film emphasizes, Christians - and Christian organizations - are still very active in healthcare activities. As seen in the example of Rehere, Christians have always employed the latest technology (from leeches to electro-magnetic imaging) to tackle ill-health and disease. Yet the idea of access to a source of spiritual healing – miracles – continues to fascinate and excite debate. For example many people, from many different Christian traditions, believe that miraculous healing continues to take place, e.g by the laying on of hands, casting out of evil spirits or blessing from shrines associated with healing such as Lourdes

What do the students think? Are such events possible? Can they be explained 'scientifically'?

Extension

- For older students (to help reflect on the crucifixion image as healing):

As a way of focusing on the possibility of Jesus's continuing healing presence in the lives of the sick, reflect on the function of the Isenheim altarpiece.

This shocking image of Christ's pain-wracked body was commissioned by Antonite monks, between 1512 and 1516, for the chapel of a hospital at the order's monastery in Isenheim, 15 miles south of Colmar. There the monks ministered to patients suffering from the painful, and often fatal, leprosy-like disease known as St Anthony's Fire names (as were the monk's themselves) for a figure who himself had known great suffering.

- What effect would the daily exposure to this picture have had on people who were suffering from this terrible disease?
- Is it just gruesome sadism?
- Or does it suggest that God shared in the sufferings of humankind – and continues to do so?

This image, and others by the painter Mathias Grunewald, can be found at the excellent Web Gallery of Art site at

<http://www.kfki.hu/~arthp/html/g/grunewal/isenheim/>

- For younger students (to help reflect on continuing Christian involvement in healthcare):

Write a modern day version of the life of Rahere. He is certainly an intriguing figure. Lots of information and images about this jester/monk can be found at

<http://www.themediweb.net/Lecture/historyofmedicine/bartsandrehere.htm>

- What made him change? (Rudyard Kipling wrote a rather obscure poem that seems to suggest that the roots of his change lay in manic depression - this poem can be found on the Jester website at <http://www.thenoodlebowl.com/jesters/pages/rahere.html>)

Students could think of a modern scenario in which a comedian has his eyes opened to the harsh realities under the surface of things – and in doing so is changed.

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Activity 5

Why are many Christians antagonistic to / reluctant to accept ideas of euthanasia/abortion? Why do others believe that they are acceptable in certain situations?

Both euthanasia and abortion are subjects ripe for debate, although unfortunately opposing sides are often intolerant of each other!

Dame Cicely Saunders, mentioned in this film, is the pioneer of modern palliative care and was instrumental in creating the modern hospice. She is opposed to euthanasia, as she believes it makes vulnerable people feel unwanted and a burden. Instead, she believes, scientific effort should be devoted to developing increasingly effective methods of relieving pain. Like many Christians, she emphasizes that human life is special, and a gift, which should be treated with reverence; she is wary of any attitude which suggests disposability. From this perspective, euthanasia is seen as suggesting latent eugenics – a fear that, in the name of National health, the weak, handicapped and infirm will be picked off. It was, after all, the mentally ‘subnormal’ who were first eliminated by Hitler.

Counter-arguments can be found at the website of the Voluntary Euthanasia Society at http://www.ves.org.uk/Deb_Intro.html

Younger pupils might approach these issues through the collective worship material based on the life and work of Cicely Saunders at http://www.culham.info/cw/assemblies/001s_saunders.html

This site, and the St Christopher’s Hospice site that it points to, could also be used by older students to start a formal debate (though it is sometimes profitable to ask what their initial stand on the issue is and then to encourage them to research and write on the opposing arguments).

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Activity 6

In the Middle Ages, people's health was threatened by starvation, infant mortality and diseases such as leprosy and bubonic plague. What are the health challenges today? To what extent does our society itself cause these problems?

Details of the current state of world health – and of the different medical problems which confront various societies – can be found on the World Health Organization web site <http://www.who.int/home-page/>

It is clear that while western society has made almost unbelievable progress in preventing and dealing with many illnesses, it has generated its own particular life-threatening problems. Many of these are directly related to our wealth and over-consumption. Older students might find a way into this issue by reflecting on this adage by Frederick Douglass, the 19th century slave-turned-abolitionist: “*Food to the indolent is poison, not sustenance*”.

Never before has so much food been so readily available, while at the same time there is tremendous pressure on young people for their body to conform to excessively thin patterns. Caught between the Scylla and Charybdis of Obesity and Anorexia, would students prefer life in the Middle Ages where there was only starvation and plague to contend with? The UK's Eating Disorder Association website, at <http://www.edauk.com/default.htm> includes some interesting poems by young people, which might provide another way in to reflect on this particular issue.

Extension

- What other health problems seem to be caused by modern living in western societies? Gather reports in the newspaper on the causes of illnesses such as lung and other cancers, asbestosis, stress etc.
- For two games (one for secondary, one for primary) showing the effects of modern life on the individual's wellbeing, see the REEP (RE and Environment) website <http://www.reep.org/>

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Collective Worship - YOUR HEALING

Four students move forward to begin...

SPEAKER 1: This morning we are going to see a short video.

SPEAKER 2: Then we'll ask some questions about it afterwards to find out what you think about everything said in the video.

Show the video, which lasts about 4 minutes.

SPEAKER 3: Ruth McCabe seems like a really nice person. She's obviously thought a lot about what is important to her and has found a way to help people she cares about.

SPEAKER 4: She told us she's a Christian and has been inspired by Jesus to follow his "*example by creating a safe place where people of all backgrounds can be cared for in both a physical and a spiritual way.*"

SPEAKER 1: At the end of the video she re-capped her view of what's most important; She said...

SPEAKER 2: "*I believe that wherever people are cared for... we need to pay attention to their heads, their hearts and their spirits. We need to see them as individual and special people and, just like Jesus, to provide them with unconditional love and support.*"

SPEAKER 3: Perhaps what she is saying is that medicines are important but we also need to pay attention to their heads, their hearts and their spirits. Sometimes people use the words body, mind and soul to refer to the same things that she talks about.

SPEAKER 4: That's right. And the question that occurs to me is this: even if someone is healthy – don't we still need to think about their heads, their hearts and their spirits?

Speaker 4 addresses the gathered students directly...

SPEAKER 1: We're not just a body – we're a mind and a soul too. So let me ask you this question... Are you taking care of your body, mind and soul? Most people here would put an elastoplast on their finger if they cut themselves and maybe even some antiseptic cream - but what do you do to make sure your mind is calm? What do you do to make sure your spirits are high?

SPEAKER 2: What do you NEED to be healthy, happy and sane in body, mind and soul? Think about it.

The speakers wait 10-15 seconds before proceeding.

SPEAKER 3: Let's think about what Ruth McCabe supplies to her patients and see if we need those things too. Even though we're not sick like the people she cares for perhaps we need certain things to keep us healthy.

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She said...

SPEAKER 4: *“Here in this hospice, I try to follow Jesus’ example by creating a safe place where people of all backgrounds can be cared for.”*

SPEAKER 1: It makes sense. We all need and deserve a safe place to live. Feeling in constant danger is one of the fastest ways to becoming ill. If you don’t feel safe there are people you can talk to about that. There’s nothing to stop you talking with a counsellor here in the school. *(Adjust to suit the circumstances.)*

SPEAKER 2: Ruth McCabe went on to talk about health care, meaning making sure that her patients eat properly and receive any medications they need.

SPEAKER 3: We all need good food to stay healthy. Do you eat the sort of food that’s going to keep you fit and healthy? Can you really expect to become a good sportsman or woman if you eat junk food all the time? Take a few seconds to think about what you ate yesterday.

The speakers wait 10-15 seconds before proceeding.

SPEAKER 4: Ruth also said *“In every modern hospital and hospice you will find spiritual care available, now provided by Chaplains, paid for by the NHS and available to patients of every faith.”* So feeding your soul is as important as feeding your body and mind.

SPEAKER 1: Feeling rotten or confused or anxious about anything is a state of mind and you can learn to change the way your mind sees whatever is making you feel angry. There’s nothing to stop you talking to someone about that. Talk to friends or arrange to see a chaplain or counsellor. They all want to help you.

SPEAKER 2: Or, if you think that wouldn’t work, try giving yourself a treat. A long soak in a warm bath often gets rid of the blues faster than anything. Or give yourself a foot massage. You can laugh but the Chinese have been making themselves healthy for hundreds of years by doing that. And top-rank sportsmen and women all over the world make sure their feet are in good shape because they know how important it is. Wherever makes you feel better is worth doing again and again. What are the things that make you feel really relaxed and happy? Think about it.

The speakers wait 10-15 seconds before proceeding.

SPEAKER 3: And the last words Ruth spoke on that video were these: *“We need to see our friends as individual and special people and, just like Jesus, to provide them with unconditional love and support.”*

SPEAKER 4: So after you’ve given yourself a treat why don’t you look for ways of helping friends and family and other people you care about? Find ways of making them feel special. It doesn’t have to be anything big or dramatic – just show that you care about them. Have a think about how you could do that.