

St Marylebone: Sermon for St Luke's day: Sunday 20th October.

Suzanne R Hyde, Director of Clinical Services at St Marylebone HCC

Good morning – it is such a delight to be able to address you this morning – and before I launch in to the ‘sermony bit’ of what I’d like share, I wanted to say a little bit about ‘why’ I’m preaching today!

So ,I am Suzanne Hyde, and I am the Director of the St Marylebone HCC – We live in the crypt downstairs - and we are what Father Stephen has often referred to as St Marylebone’s best kept secret – well ,in the seven years now that I’ve been here – I hope this is beginning to change.

Mother Katy on Friday at our staff meeting talked us through the rich recent history of St Marylebone, when since the mid 80s the vision was for St Marylebone to be a place where different practices – spiritual, psychological and physical came together in a common quest for wholeness: the Church caters for the spiritual needs, the NHS that we share the crypt with, caters for the physical [11,000 patients!] and HCC offers weekly psychotherapy for up to two years – and sees over 70 clients a week, as well as running a weekly mental health group – where people can find a safe place to explore their often difficult and often tragic mental health journeys. We also undertake psychological assessments for those exploring their vocation to train as Priests in the Church of England. We’re a veritable hub of activity. We have a team of over 40 therapists and a consulting psychiatrist, who came here on placement when she was undertaking the ordination journey – and then liked us so much – she became part of our team. Do check out our website and after the service, I’d like to extend a warm welcome for you to come downstairs and visit our very generously re-furbished, covid friendly psychotherapy Centre, where Margaret Sykes, our Practice manager and I would love to tell you more!

The other reason for me speaking this particular Sunday, is because Friday was the Feast day of Saint Luke. St Luke, as well as being the Patron Saint of Artists [Xian tradition says he painted a portrait of the Virgin Mary and the Christ Child]. He also

was a physician and I discovered that his symbol is of a winged Ox or bull [traditionally the most valuable sacrifice offered to God - thought to have been attributed to him in Revelation.] An ox, apparently, symbolises 'sacrifice, service and strength'. It is also thought that Luke's gospel - more than the other Gospel writers, presents Jesus as suffering for and being sacrificed on behalf of humanity, his gospel also focuses on the more miraculous physical healings. But the key message of Luke's Gospel is 'the upside-down nature of God's kingdom – a place where all are welcome, and power structures are reversed.' [source: google]

And so, this is where I want to start – to welcome you today, here, in this beautiful building, which offers so much to so many. You are welcome. Not just your 'Sunday best self' - but ALL of yourself. Easy words to say – but what if you've had a terrible week – and in fact – I actually did have one – illness in the family and unexpected pressures, and then on Friday my car failed it's MOT– more pressure! I was feeling that what happened this week was not welcome, and I knew I was wanting to speak today about resilience – and hey presto, life threw a curve ball that challenged my own resilience! A young patient of mine was also bemoaning how upset she was that she hadn't demonstrated 'more resilience' when moving into a much wanted first new house, only to find it infested with fleas – that even after three treatments kept coming back! So, resilience is the buzz word of the moment. But I want to talk a bit about what it really means, and I'll come back to my patient a bit later – as I had an interesting message for her!

A definition of resilience is 'the ability to adapt to and to recover from difficult life events while maintaining psychological well-being. ...and crucially 'it involves being able to cope with challenging situations while – and this is the KEY POINT I want to share today - 'whilst STILL FEELING EMOTIONS LIKE ANGER, GRIEF AND PAIN.' [Mayo clinic]. However, often our capacity to achieve the above is mainly [and I would say 90%] of our resilience is built in our early life. As I was preparing this talk, a friend sent me a Ted talk by a 7-year-old girl, called Molly Bright. You may know that Ted talks are short, recorded speeches that aim to spread innovative ideas and people are usually experts in a particular field – and mustn't speak longer than 18 minutes – eek – I better hurry up with my talk! –

So, 7-year-old Molly Wright [Ted talk 23 November 2022] gave a talk on, wait for it, neuroscience, called: 'What if I was to tell you that a game of peek a boo' could change the world!

Now I'm going to briefly tell you about her talk because as I listened, I realised that she was actually talking about how resilience is built. She says findings from neuroscience prove that in the first five years of life, our brain develops massively and our relationship with our care givers hugely impacts how we develop as human beings. By seven, 90% of our full adult brain is developed and this includes not only our intelligence, but our capacities for relationship, self-regulation [another buzz word] and how we relate to the world - and most of this is achieved through simple games like peek a boo, and imitation. Now of course Freud said all this this many years ago [without actual scientific back up – but more from his observations and early work as a neuroscientist, and analyst.] In our early years our brains create 1 million neural connections every second! But for them to do this ... she says - speaking to a room full of adults - we need your help. For a child to develop healthily, into a well-balanced, resilient adult they need the following five conditions to be met:

Connecting,

Talking

Playing

A Healthy home

And Community .

Little Molly uses her next door neighbour and his young baby, to demonstrate what happens when children don't get the proper care and attention that they need – the father is playing with his son, peek a boo [which helps to build memory and trust] and then a bit later dad gets his I-pad/or iPhone out – and the child becomes visibly distressed and tries to get his father's attention. Now of course, this was an experiment – and quickly the father started playing with him again. But it showed the terrible distress it caused the baby. Molly said watching the clip – that of course this is repeated so many times as we as parents are always on their gadgets. She says very simply - 'It makes me feel sad.'

Now I'm not going to go into all of this – but do watch her Ted Talk – as she is absolutely charming.

She implores the audience – the adults – ‘connect with us, talk to us play with us!’ -

So, you may be thinking – what's that got to do with us, here and now – is it too late! Well of course she said 90% is formed – but what neuroscientists also have discovered – and it's something that I have shared before – is the plasticity of our brains – that we can – with effort, and attention, still continue to build new neural pathways. And so, this is fantastic news - and of course why the work we do downstairs is so important and life-changing. Psychotherapy can model these five conditions, but also we as humans, as Church people can also adopt and employ these principles, both with ourselves and in our interactions with others.

And of course, – our earlier reading from Isaiah [Isaiah 35, v 1-10] showed that God was way ahead of our neuroscientists – Isaiah implores us to:

Strengthen – our areas of weakness

To firm up feeble parts of ourselves.

To encourage and connect with each other - he says ‘say to those who are of a fearful heart – be Strong, do not fear!’ and sometimes in our lives, we have to say those words to ourselves, to make sure we challenge the internal tapes in our head, which may, because of our lack of early helpful parenting, [or not good enough – I think parents are getting a bit of a hard of time of it at the moment – but that's another talk!] We may have adopted a negative, fearful, mistrustful attitude to the world. We can do much to address this – and overarching this, as Isaiah says ‘Here is your God’ -

We need to teach ourselves to trust in the goodness and support and steadfastness of God – who never changes! But also, to trust [appropriately] in those around us who we can trust and who support us.

Then....then ... great change can and will and does happen -

Blind people will see – and often I understand this symbolically – that we can begin to ‘see’, to become conscious of where we are not looking after ourselves or are treating ourselves as we would never treat someone else. He says ‘Deaf people will hear–’ again, I see this as symbolic too – that maybe we can start hearing helpful messages and communications – and realise that we need to re-tune our ears to look out for the good in others and the world.

The lame shall ‘leap like a deer – and there will be streams in the desert! - I love that quote – and indeed often in my practice and in the Centre when we get feedback from clients – they often speak about how much the therapy has changed the landscape of their lives, the world, other people haven’t changed, but they have been able to make changes, and this has brought them joy and freedom. And of course, that freedom is available to all – not just through therapy, but through our Spiritual practices and our contributions to our community and each other. I want to mention *Making Sense*, our mental health Group, where I’ve seen people with really difficult challenges, be able to connect and support each other and also begin to say difficult things and challenging things to each other – and begin to change!

As I draw to close, I was struck by a book that I’ve been reading this week by the comedian/actress Miranda Hart, [*I haven’t been entirely Honest with you*. October, 2024, Penguin Book], where she honestly and painfully, shares her terrible journey of being rock bottom through ill health [eventually diagnosed as Lyme’s disease] and how it affected her psychologically. She shares the, ‘treasures’ as she calls them, that she - eventually - learnt through the process and to name a few, these are the importance of ‘sharing with others’, of accepting what ‘is’, to ‘feel our feelings’ [just read the psalms to see how good they were at that!] to challenge our thoughts, to play, and many other things. These are the things that build resilience.

Pema Chodron [from her book *'When Things Fall Apart, December 1996*], a Buddhist nun comments, that in these challenging times 'awakening [or as I would see it, becoming more conscious] is no longer a luxury or an ideal. It's becoming critical. We need to relate sanely with difficult times.' We don't need a crystal ball to predict that there are tough times ahead, both politically, globally and probably personally – but what we can do is build our resilience in everyday life and experiences, learning as we go.

Back to my patient – when she bewailed how badly she had 'failed' at resilience, I said to her –but the point is – you showed great resilience – you shared your feelings of anger, upset, and fear with me, you took appropriate action[i.e. she returned to her parents home temporarily], you kept yourself and your flatmates safe[investing in good treatments and hard cleaning work, and also had at times, a sense of humour about it too. That my friends IS resilience – it is not '**not** having any feelings or being 'STRONG' - it is accepting what happens, facing it, feeling it, seeking help, being grateful for the help that is offered. - Miranda concludes her book by saying '*I have understood through this process, the vital need for connection and support to help each other be the best of ourselves. I will never "go it alone" again.*'..

And again, I say to you – that you are welcome – all of you is welcome and Here is your GOD and here is your community.

AMEN

Suzanne Hyde is director of clinical services at St Marylebone HCC and is also a Jungian Analyst, psychotherapist and Supervisor in Private Practice in Hertfordshire.