Thought for the week: *Alastair McIntosh* takes care

'I was moved to see an official write with such compassion.'

Recently I chanced to catch a blog post written by Donald Macaskill. He is the head of Scottish Care, an umbrella organisation for care homes. Titled '200 Days of Emptiness' it reflected on the length of time that care home lockdown had then been in place. I was moved to see an official write with such compassion of what he called 'the emptiness of grieving, of lostness and aloneness'.

Right now, I'm experiencing it at first hand. Our mother in her nineties lived an independent life in Stornoway until a fall that banged her head. Now, and with immense gratitude to council carers and the Lewis Hospital, my sister and I have brought her down to nursing care here in Glasgow, where she'll be closer to family.

I completely understand the need for coronavirus restrictions, yet it's hard to visit a confused loved one through just open doors or windows. I asked the care home manager how they're coping. She said that the psychological load on residents and their families 'is horrendous'.

'But what about your staff? What's it like for all of you?'

'I don't feel depressed,' she replied. 'But I feel sad all the time.'

'It was easier back in the spring. People clapped for carers and the NHS. Even the police when going past the home might give a little flash of the blue light. But now as things become more routine, the care home manager is worried that the old may be forgotten.'

It was easier back in April, May and June. People clapped for carers and the NHS. Even the police when going past the home might give a little flash of the blue light. But now as things become more routine, she's worried that the old may be forgotten.

My mind turned to a story in the Bible: that when Israel's King David had grown 'old and stricken in years', they covered him with clothes, but he could get no heat.

And so my thought today is with all care home staff – as they give heat, and human warmth beyond the covering of clothes.

Prayer is more than just a thing we do. It's that which God does through us.

May all who might be caught up in 'the emptiness of grieving, of lostness and aloneness' – experience such deeper layers of warmth around them. ●

Alastair is from Glasgow Meeting.

Photo by K. Mitch Hodge on Unsplash.

BROADCAST AS "THOUGHT FOR THE DAY", BBC RADIO SCOTLAND, 29-9-20

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'Each one of us can help to heal the hurts that a wider world experiences.'

Following the violence of the storming of the United States' Capitol building, legislators there are considering their response to Donald Trump's role in the events.

While the news was unfolding, I found myself in a strange situation: for I had just concluded sitting with my elderly mother as she went through her last days in a care home.

At both the global and the personal levels, things were in tumult; and yet, not for the first time in life, I experienced what I've come to think of as the spiritual light of death.

Through it I saw how much she'd loved me, how much I loved her; and moreover: this light shone out onto the sufferings of the world, and from a God who says: 'I am with you always.'

The care home that we'd found is run by a Jewish charity, one that accepts people of all faiths, and there I'd witnessed an exquisite tenderness and presence of being in how the staff had nursed her.

A housekeeper told me: 'It's hard work, but we all love it here.' And a carer mentioned how she'd sometimes drop in to the home on her days off, just to add a helping hand.

'Most of the staff weren't Jewish and neither is our family. These were just ordinary Glasgow folks; but in that light of death they appeared to me as spiritual threads that wove a scintillating fabric.'

Most of the staff of the home weren't Jewish, and neither is anyone in our family. The people taking care of my mother were just ordinary Glasgow folks; but in that light of death they appeared to me as spiritual threads that wove a scintillating fabric.

In the days that followed, as my mind glanced over to the developing situation in the United States, I thought of how each one of us can help to heal the hurts that a wider world experiences. To heal the hurts to democracy, the hurts that Donald Trump has caused, perhaps also the hurts to him, and in his followers; and all at so many levels.

The USA's legislators may or may not take action against the former president in the coming weeks. But each of *us* can act. Each of us can weave a little love into the fabric of the world, and maybe ask what human beings are for. Maybe we could take a cue from care home workers and maybe even learn how to build a care society. ●

Alastair is from Glasgow Meeting. This text was first read on BBC Radio Scotland's 'Thought for the Day' (12 January).

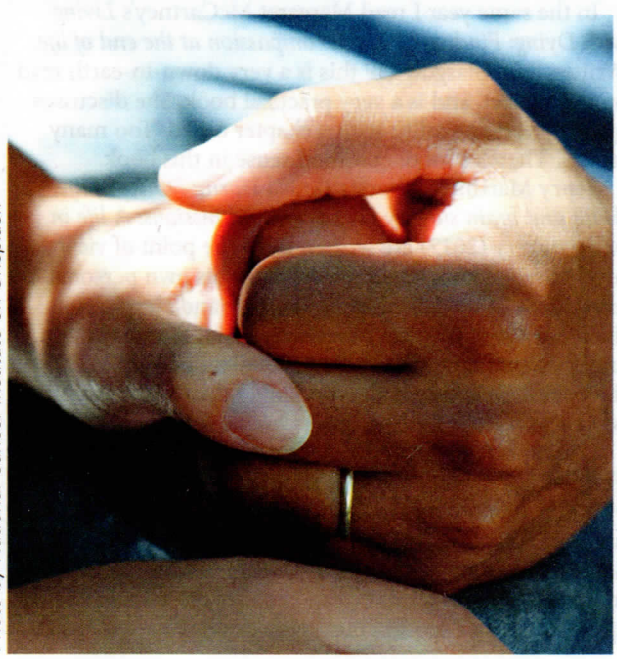


Photo by National Cancer Institute on Unsplash

Thought for the week: *Alastair McIntosh* on Women's Day

'More is going on than meets the eye.'

A couple of weeks ago it was International Women's Day (8 March). It was in that week that the tragedy of Sarah Everard's murder was unfolding, and on the Wednesday a YouGov poll revealed that eighty per cent of British women have experienced sexual harassment in our shared public spaces.

Many of these women shared their outrage on social media. They said they often don't feel safe outdoors, and that men must take responsibility. But that demands the eyes and heart to see the problem.

It made me think about a story of two women in the fifth chapter of Mark's gospel. A synagogue official called Jairus begs Jesus to come and heal his dying daughter.

'Women shared their outrage on social media. They said they often don't feel safe outdoors, and that men must take responsibility. But that demands the eyes and heart to see the problem.'

As he sets off to their house, another woman comes to touch his coat, hoping to find healing.

A symmetry of numbers connects both of these characters. The girl was twelve years old, just on the cusp of womanhood as it would have been understood then. And we're told the older woman had been bleeding for the same length of time.

Most translations into English don't bring out the depth of this woman's suffering. They speak about her 'illness', her 'affliction' or her 'plague', and mention that doctors had been unable to cure her. But the Greek original puts the situation in much stronger terms. It suggests a tortuous, oppressive pain; and specifically, such as that caused by a metal-studded whip.

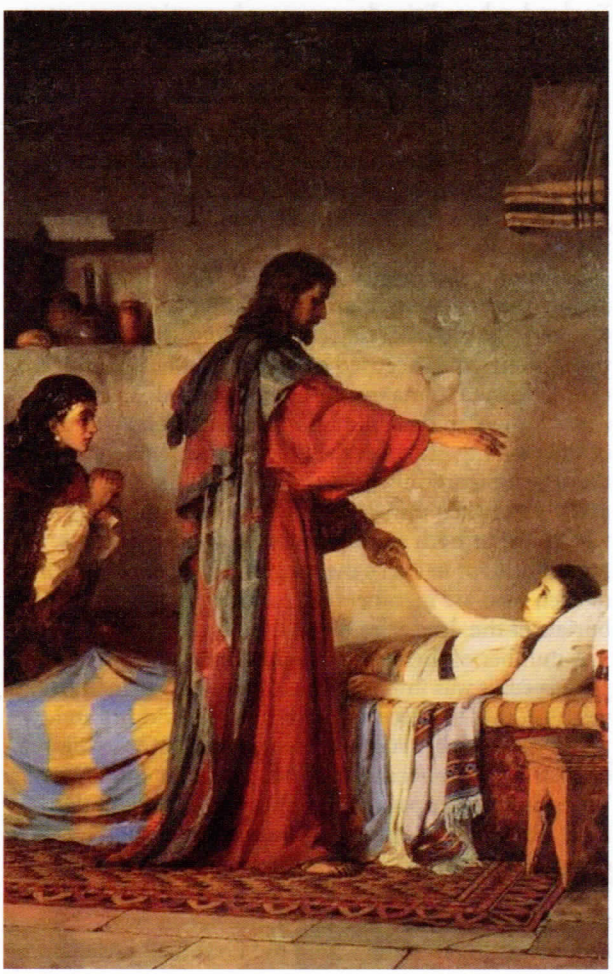
What's more, when Jesus asked the older woman why it was that she'd touched him, she tells 'the whole truth' or, as an old translation puts it much better: 'the truth of every hinge'.

This hints that more is going on than meets the eye. The woman's plight is in a highly patriarchal culture. With eyes to see and heart to feel, could that be what the story is about?

The girl is dead when Jesus gets there. But he raises her with words of affirmation – 'Young woman, stand up!' – and he tells her father and her mother to give her nourishment.

Now, with the week of International Women's Day over, I leave you with a thought: What nourishment is called for in our times? And what, to stand against the powers of patriarchy? ●

Alastair is from Glasgow Meeting.



Resurrection of Jairus's Daughter, Vasily Polenov, 1871