

Candlemas 2020: Prayers led by Debbie Thrower

Lord and Father, we give you thanks for Simeon and Anna, those great role models of faithful, hopeful, older people. May their sense of expectation and our glimpses of their transformation continue to resonate in our generation and inspire us.

Lord in your mercy

Hear our prayer

Lord of all hope, we give you thanks for the willingness of those women and men to respond to your call to be Anna Chaplains... many in their own retirement years themselves... and we give thanks for the renewed sense of meaning and purpose such ministry is offering, and providing fulfilment in this period of life.

Lord in your mercy

Hear our prayer

Lord, we give you thanks for the people they meet and support, for all the work done through the growing national network of all those ministering to people in their later years. And we pray, today, especially, for all who have been commissioned as new Anna Chaplains, at other Candlemas services, in Morpeth in Northumberland – 27* of them in one cohort, commissioned by the Bishop of Berwick, but representing several different denominations; including Anglicans, Methodists, and Baptists. At the other end of the country we pray for another Anna Chaplain commissioned in Somerset today to work with the churches based in Wiveliscombe. And for yet another commissioned by the Bishop of Tonbridge earlier this week in Tunbridge Wells, Kent.

Lord in your mercy

Hear our prayer

We ask for your guidance, Lord, as this work expands through The Bible Reading Fellowship, BRF. Give us wisdom to hear your promptings and to obey your will; help us to nurture growth in terms of spiritual support wherever you send us... so we may see more buds emerging and in places burgeoning.

Lord in your mercy

Hear our prayer

Faithful God,
You have promised in Christ to be with us to the end of time.
Come close to those who have lived long and experienced much.
Help them to continue to be faithful
and, within the all-age Kingdom of God,
to find ways to go on giving and receiving your grace, day by day.
For your glory and your kingdom
Amen

Prayer and reflection led by Debbie Thrower

That poem 'The Key' was written by the poet John Killick but are the *actual words* of someone living with dementia.

John's way of working extends over many weeks while he forges a relationship with the individual before composing the final poem.

He listens carefully and, 'At a certain point,' he says, 'I may ask permission to write down or tape-record their words.' Occasionally a poem is arrived at there and then. Usually, it is a matter of taking away their words and working on them. 'There is one important exception though (and this is the golden rule,' he says): 'I add nothing, only take away.'

John looks for the emotional thread when crafting these poems and then takes the finished one back and reads it with the person and, if possible, their relatives. He says the majority of people appear to value the process tremendously. It's confirmation for them that their words are being taken seriously and are an affirmation for readers – for all of us - that it *is worth* communicating with people living with dementia.

John is not an Anna Chaplain, and Anna Chaplains don't work only with people with dementia...We're there for older men and women of all cognitive abilities, for their relatives too, and their paid professional carers (who also need support). But the meticulous way in which John listens and appreciates the gifts that people in their later years have to offer us all... is *an inspiration* to those of us involved in this form of ministry.

I remember when I began being a chaplain for older people - ten years ago this month- one of *my* motivators then... were some words of Dame Cicely Saunders', the pioneer of the modern hospice movement and a palliative care specialist.

One day when she was touring the wards at St Christopher's Hospice in South London, she asked a male patient what he needed most, once his pain relief was taken care of? 'For

someone to *look* as if they are trying to understand me’ he replied. For someone to look as if they are *trying to understand* me.’

As the network of Anna Chaplains has developed in recent years – each one has been made aware of that story – in their training, in the handbook that we’ve produced, the ‘how to’ manual, if you like, for this work. Because *that* is primarily what we’re about: drawing alongside others to be compassionate listeners... putting ourselves imaginatively in their shoes. And trying to honour the mystery that we are... to each other (and to ourselves)- trying to express through facial expression and gesture... as well as words... that we *are* trying to understand them. That’s the essence of spiritual care’.

Let us pray: ‘Lord and Father, we give you thanks for the treasure we have within our own immortal souls, help us to cultivate hope for the days that lie ahead on our earthly journey as we age, and for the prospect of eternal life in your company... when we shall be fully known... and fully understood.

As John Donne, that great poet of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries expressed it: ‘All Mankind is of one author and is one volume; when one man dies, one chapter is not torne out of the booke, but translated into a better language; and every chapter must be so translated.’

Lord, whether we have a confidently expressed faith, or just incoherent doubts and fears, whether we show no inclination to seek faith as such ... may you, nevertheless, come to us, our Emmanuel, our God ‘with us’... and be our friend and guide in *this* world *and* the next... through Jesus Christ we pray.

Amen

Debbie Thrower

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