

## [Homo] Humani nihila me alienum puto

**I am human therefore any concern is my concern.**

This is The Royal London Hospital motto. I trained there in the 70s when it was known as The London Hospital. This motto was instilled into every aspect of our caring work.

Within the first few weeks we were introduced to the story of Joseph Merrick. Degradingly named “The Elephant Man” A tragic story of abandonment and homelessness due to his disability. Scoliosis, large outgrowth of tumours disfigured his face, overgrown arm caused him to be regarded a monster. He became a figure for others to taunt and profit by. Each time I recall this story I am moved by how small his world must have been as he looked out through two small holes in a bag he placed over his head.

While his outer self was distorted his inner self was gentle and kind. He never bore any ill will or malice. Simply wished to be loved for who he was, not what he was. Thanks to the surgeon Sir Frederick Treves who brought Joseph to live at The London Hospital, he spent the last 4 years of his short life in comfort and being loved. He had good quality clothes.

Enough food. Clean bed linen each day. Medication he required to combat pain. Now his visitors were ladies of high society. They came with genuine friendship. To be part of his life. Now he was being admired as a person.



*A leper appeared and went to his knees before Jesus, praying, “Master, if you want to, you can heal my body.”*

*Jesus reached out and touched him, saying, “I want to. Be clean.” Then and there, all signs of the leprosy were gone. {Matthew 8:2-3}*

There is a Leprosy Hospital in Nepal, half way up a mountain. A community nearby would rather travel miles downhill than attend this hospital. Then came the earthquake. The roads damaged and impassable. No way to the community hospital. The Leprosy Hospital had survived intact. The patients volunteered their beds for the injured. They also served them

their meals. Fed those unable to feed themselves. They welcomed the very people who had rejected them. Like Joseph they bore no malice or ill will. The people with broken bodies forgot or ignored the fact they were recovering in the very beds that belonged to those suffering leprosy. This new relationship continues today.

Life is made of moments. Moments being touched.

Near to where I once lived a man had made his home in a wood. As you travelled passed you could see his home. A canvas hanging between two trees. A camp fire always lit. Then he was admitted to the ward I was working on. I



spent most of that morning gently scrubbing years of in-grained dirt, de-licing and washing his hair, cleaning under nails, clipping nails and with his permission I shaved him. All the while we chatted about this and that. Nothing special. We smiled and laughed together. He spent about two weeks with us. To this day I see him sitting up in bed. Body drawn tall with a constant cheeky smile. Joining in conversations I expect he had not had for years. I can't remember what happened to him when discharged. But I always hope he held onto the memories of being a person without a label. All be it for a short while he knew who he was not what he was.

*Jesus asked his disciples "Who touched me?" They answered "Dozens have touched you"*

Jesus was determined to find the one person He knew was now risking everything to be healed.

*"You took a risk of faith and now you are healed and whole". [Mark 5:31-34]*

We find ourselves at the crossroads facing one of our spiritual challenges. The loss of sensation in self- isolating, shielding, keeping our distance and deciding to mix with strangers or not. This is today's Biblical leprosy.

Who am I? What kind of humanity will I help to create? Will it embrace all people?

Today's Psalm is 88. It reflects the despair of seeing no future. An experience that draws us into both Jesus' cross experience and those lost and alone in society of feeling completely abandoned. Yet the refrain underpins awareness of God's presence, "*You are my refuge, my portion in the land of the living*". Even though the psalmist cannot see a way out there is a trust God will hear.



Jesus reinforces this in the set Gospel reading. The story of Zacchaeus who had become rich on the back of being a chief tax collector. To the surprise of the crowd Jesus chose Zacchaeus as the person he wished to share company with.

*Salvation has come to this house because he is a son of Abraham. For the Son of Man came to seek out and save the lost. {Luke 19:9-10}*

We pray.

Hear us God as we pray for all who are lost and lonely. Those worn out with the pressures of today. Those who see no point in living. While we have little if any understanding on their struggles, hear our cries for them. In their wanderings we pray they come to know your loving presence. We pray in time they will find the confidence to express their true emotions. On their behalf we trust you will bring them out from darkness of despair to be touched by your guiding light. Amen



We all matter to God.

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