

## Talk on Dementia

Loving Father may the words that I speak, and the words your people hear be yours and not mine.

As some of you may be aware, this last week has been Dementia awareness week. This has been the Alzheimer's society annual awareness raising campaign.

During last week people have been asked to unite and take actions however large or small that will make every day life a little smoother for people who are affected by dementia. Many of us worry about saying the wrong thing to someone who has dementia, yet a friendly face or a listening ear can make the world of difference.

During this Dementia action week we have been encouraged to take action by starting a conversation, whether it's calling a relative or visiting a neighbor who has dementia.

Last year's campaign called upon everyone to recognise that people affected by dementia have a right to be treated equally, and live the lives they want - free from fear and prejudice so by starting a conversation, this could go along way to help achieve this.

As I have already stated, it can be and is a difficult thing to do or approach someone who is living with this disease, and that is what it is a disease. I would like to try and break down some of this difficulty by sharing with you some of the most amazing moments I have had when visiting the residents of Soham Lodge and Fairhaven.

I started to visit Soham lodge under Tim's guidance, Tim would take communion to one of the residents and then would play the piano for a little while after to the rest of the residents, it was while playing the piano he was told to " Shut that racket up " by one of the residents, as he was playing " All things bright and beautiful" that got me hooked!!

It is a most wonderful thing to witness, when I take Communion to both residential homes, the people there that receive the Holy sacraments can remember the service and what to say and do, albeit being a shorter service than we are used to here in Church. These people are all at different stages of their illness, but mostly can remember the Hymns we sing in our hymnals, so much so they don't need the words, some are encouraged to do solos or to start us off.

I get to hear a lot of stories, but one of my favourite ones, is of a lady resident who when she was a young woman would work driving the bakers van, this was towards the end of WW2, one particular morning the army were practising maneuvers, there was a tank involved, this tank was on its way to the village where she lived, on seeing this the young lady decided it was too dangerous and parked her bakers van across its path. On this occasion the British army lost the battle.

There are many many other fond memories I have. A gentleman who had no obvious way of communication, was tapping his foot in time with the tune of a hymn we were singing, and then there was the lady who would not join in with the hymn singing, so one of the carers suggested playing some old singalongs in between the hymns. I started to hum the tune of "Knees up mother brown" that was it, what a transformation, the lady was even trying to get up and dance when we put the CD on.

But of course there are the sadder times as well, I'm no expert but. I remember my dad, when he had early onset dementia he would get very confused and upset, but that little bit of attention and that listening ear did seem to help. As my dad's dementia got worse, ( He had Alzheimer's by the way) he didn't really recognise me, I believe he thought he should know me, but wasn't quite sure. However I managed to find my dad's brother, neither of us had seen him for about thirty years, so I took him to see my dad, on that meeting my dad cried and smiled at the same time. I knew at that point my dad was still there somewhere.

As I have just mentioned my Dad had Alzheimer's, this is just one of over a hundred variants of Dementia and the most common. Each variant attacks different parts of the brain, I'm not going to get technical or medical, but it doesn't just affect the memory. Some forms of dementia can attack the emotions, others the way we communicate, our thought patterns and our perception. Earlier last month we had a Dementia champion here in church, we had an hour's presentation which was very informative, three points stuck in my mind from that presentation and if you don't mind I would like to share them with you.

1, To a person who is living with dementia, a darker coloured mat on the floor could be mistaken for a deep hole, so if this mat was in a shop doorway, they could be hesitant about going in, for fear of falling into that hole.

2, The colour black, is very difficult to see or make out, so if you are wearing a black jumper and you hold out your hand, this could be very distressing and frightening to that person.

3, The third was an analogy of a symptom of dementia. If you bought a dodgy bookcase from Homebase and filled it from the bottom upwards, which books would fall off first? ( wait for answer) The top one's, the ones that were put on last.

So that is how it is with someone suffering from dementia, the first memory's to go are the newest ones, so normally the older memories are rooted into the brain, they have been there longer if you like and are the last to be affected. So that's why when singing hymns or listening to their stories, they would have learnt and remembered them from the past.

As I mentioned there was a lot of information that came from that presentation. We did touch on becoming recognised as a Dementia friendly church, for which I now have some useful links, I also have a self help resource pack that would help us to do a self assessment on where we are regarding us being a Dementia friendly church, so if anyone would be interested in this, I would not refuse any offers of help.

We heard in John's gospel, Jesus talking to and healing the paralyzed man at the pool of " Beth-zather " Jesus also talked to and healed not only people with physical disabilities but people who had problems with their mind. So If I may share a prayer with you that I have found by Carolyn Haynali. It is titled, A prayer for an Alzheimer's patient.

Pray for me I was once like you. Be kind and loving to me, that's how I would have treated you. Remember I was once someone's parent or spouse, I had a life and a dream for the future. Speak to me, I can hear you even if I don't understand what you are saying. Speak to me of things in my past of which I can still relate. Be considerate of me, my days are such a struggle. Think of my feelings because I still have them and can feel pain. Treat me with respect because I would have treated you that way. Think of how I was before I got Alzheimer's; I was full of life, I had a life, laughed and loved you. Think of how I am now, my disease distorts my thinking, my feelings, and my ability to respond, but I still love you even if I can't tell you. Think about my future because I used to. Remember I was full of hope for the future, just like you are now. Think how it would be to have things locked in your mind and can't let them out. I need you to understand and not blame me, but Alzheimer's. I still need the compassion and the touching and most of all I still need you to love me. Keep me in your prayers because I am in between life and death. The love you give will be a blessing from God, and both of us will live forever. How you live and what you do today will always be remembered in the heart, of an Alzheimer's patient.