

SERMON: 17 November 2019 – Rev Brenda Robson
“FOCUS ON CROSSREACH” (Matthew 25:31–46 and James 2:14–17)

I have enjoyed researching the history and work of Crossreach – I learnt a lot of things I didn't know. Huge range of work and care and influence in Scottish life for one and a half centuries.

Wasn't hard to choose scripture for today – Matthew 25 was obvious – we have heard it several times in recent months in different contexts – the most recent time I am aware of was at In Focus last month when Parish nurse Christine came to speak to us about her work in her parish in Dundee. She was literally involved in feeding the hungry and the thirsty and clothing the poor and tending the sick and helping to release people from the prisons of addictions.

And so with the activities of Crossreach for 150 years.

There has been much debate amongst theologians over the centuries about whether we are saved through faith alone or through our deeds and actions.

After all we are told “whosoever believes will have eternal life.” But believing cannot be separated from acting. If we believe in God as Christians then we want to follow Jesus and his example and that means being servants to others. He is the Servant King. It means showing Christ's love and compassion to others

Nowhere in the Bible is it clearer than in the book of James. James 2:14 – The Passion Translation – **My dear brothers and sisters, what good is it if someone claims to have faith but demonstrates no good works to prove it? How could this kind of faith save anyone? For example, if a brother or sister is poorly clothed and hungry and you leave them saying “Good-bye. I hope you stay warm and have plenty to eat” but you don't provide them with a coat or even a cup of soup, what good is your faith? So then faith that doesn't involve action is phony.”**

Jesus had faith in God that could move mountains and calm stormy seas and command evil spirits and raise people from the dead and walk on water – but if he had kept his faith to himself, become totally engrossed in carpentry and his family life in Nazareth for another 30 years, we would still be lost for eternity. We know him, and we know God, through his words and his deeds.

The Mission Statement of CrossReach –

In Christ's name we seek to support people to achieve the highest quality of life which they are capable of achieving at any given time.

The Ethos of CrossReach –

We aim to show the practical side of our Christian faith by reflecting Christian love to those we support through our leadership, management and working relationships.

The history of CrossReach stretches back 150 years to the formation of the Church of Scotland Committee on Christian Life and Work in 1869. Throughout this time CrossReach and its predecessor

bodies have worked in communities all over Scotland and beyond, providing social care for those most in need. The services provided have been as numerous as they are varied and have adapted to respond to the needs of the time

One of the earliest and lasting successes of the Committee was the establishment of **Life and Work Magazine**.

The **Young Men's Guild** was established to engage the young men throughout the country and encourage them to take an active part in the Church. By 1882 the Guild had over 3000 members. Among the notable activities of the Guild was the provision of welfare tents for the Territorial Army which began in 1904. During the First World War the Guild established 25 centres, manned by 350 workers, in battlefields in France and Flanders.

The **Woman's Guild** was established by the committee in 1887. The general aim of the Guild was to unite together all women engaged in the service of Christ in connection with the Church or desire to give help or any practical Christian work in the Parish. Although it was soon established as being independent from the Committee the Guild has worked closely with the Committee and its predecessor bodies to this day, often raising much needed funds and providing valuable support to the social services of the Church.

1894 Founded The Deaconess Training Hospital in Edinburgh.

1904 The General Assembly established the Committee on Social Work so that the Church had a full share in social and rescue work. From its inception, the Committee on Social Work assisted with personal and domestic problems beyond the resources of congregational life. In opening hostels for young men and women, as well as rehabilitation centres and training homes, the committee provided shelter and relief to the unemployed and destitute. Support soon expanded into providing residential care for children (1914) and the elderly (1926).

The Committee opened its first elderly care home in 1926, at Powfoulis House in Stirlingshire. It was a modest venture, with accommodation for thirty-five residents in sparsely furnished rooms, with little privacy. Standards of furnishings and equipment were very different from what they would become just a few decades later. Sitting rooms were equipped with gifts of old chairs from interested donors, bedrooms had a variety of iron bedsteads, with flock mattresses, and one large wardrobe in each bedroom. Twenty coal fires requiring constant attention, took the place of central heating and a second-hand electricity generating plant, which was more often than not out of order, was the main source of lighting, until 1938 when the house was connected to the main electricity line. Even with all these inadequacies Powfoulis proved to be a preferable alternative to the workhouse for many people. And many more care homes followed.

1962 - Opened the Tom Allan Centre for counselling.

1976 The Board of Social Responsibility was formed. Over the next decade, the services offered by the Committee continued to respond to the Government's changing approach to social care.

1983 Williamwood specialist care home for people who have dementia was opened.

1985 Rainbow House opened to support adults recovering from substance use.

1988 Dick Stewart Centre opened offering supported accommodation for male offenders who have recently left prison.

1995 Opened The Mallard, a short breaks service for children and young people with disabilities.

1995 Opened the Postnatal Depression Service in Edinburgh.

You can check out the many new 21st century initiatives on line. The range of the work is so wide and literally covers every stage of life from before birth until after death. Projects look at supporting young pregnant mums who are vulnerable and further support in the post natal months. And other projects provide support with end of life issues such as dementia and social care and nursing homes and bereavement counselling.

CrossReach works in the area of children's counselling and play therapy, support for child carers, care for the vulnerable, those with additional needs, work with young offenders and older offenders in prison, work with those addicted to drugs and alcohol.

On behalf of the church and in Christ's name CrossReach surely fulfills the requirements of Matthew 25 to feed and clothe, to provide care, show compassion and love, tend the sick and vulnerable, visit the prisoner.

As the church in this parish of Kirknewton and East Calder we try to do these things too, obviously on a smaller scale, and we are constantly looking for new ways to serve the community, reach the lost and generally make people's lives better.

The listening Project is looking at how we can come alongside people more effectively, take an interest in the struggles and difficulties people face in the short term and in the long term, show willingness to listen and encourage and affirm others on their journey.

Some of us are also looking at how we might extend pastoral care to help those in need in our community. Our faith and our actions should go hand in hand. Prayer and practical help should go hand in hand. We pray for people, we pray with people, we meet them where they are and walk alongside them.

In speaking with local health and care professionals, it is clear that one of the greatest needs in our community is loneliness. The fast pace of modern life can leave people behind.

Physical and mental health problems can confine people in their homes for days on end.

Life changing events such as the loss of a partner through death or divorce require huge adjustments which are hard to make and take time.

Moving to a new area and knowing no-one, having no family nearby, giving up work to be at home with a new baby, there are many reasons for feelings of loneliness and isolation.

The lead up to Christmas can be the worst time of year for many.

Long dark nights mean doors are locked and curtains are drawn early. This, after a long day in which a person might have spoken to no-one.

The shops and the television tell us that everyone else out there is happy and merry and having a great time!

CrossReach describes loneliness like this –

“Self-reliance is widely accepted as strength in society and loneliness ay carry a stigma for people to admit it. If loneliness is transient (a temporary phase) we accept it as part of life but we have a deep dread of being lonely for the long haul. One approach to loneliness is to aim to prevent it.”

And so CrossReach has projects tackling loneliness. One lady shared her testimony -

Rose, an 80 year young lady was referred to Befriend Motherwell for 1 to 1 befriending, following a period in hospital as a result of a bad infection. She suffered from a spinal condition along with poor kidney function and, as a result, had very poor mobility and could not leave the house on her own.

Rose only recently moved to the area at the suggestion of her family, however since moving, her family member had been diagnosed with the same spinal condition and was unable to visit her, which then resulted in her becoming very isolated.

An initial assessment visit was carried out and it became apparent that Rose had not left her upstairs flat in over two months and had very little social interaction. This isolation had impacted her mood negatively and, as a result, she was becoming less social and very tired a lot of the time. Prior to the hospital admission, Rose attended church and a local coffee morning weekly, however she felt that she was becoming a burden to people if she was going to require a lot of support to attend, so no longer did.

A befriending relationship was set up with a female in her 20s who is very lively and engaging. From the initial meeting it was clear that the two ladies had a lot in common and were going to get along well. They have met weekly since then and, as well as visits taking place in the house, when she was feeling strong enough, they visited local garden centres, shops and tearooms.



Rose now tells us that her befriender is the “best thing that could have happened to her”. She had been slightly apprehensive in the beginning about a younger befriender and worried that they wouldn’t have anything to talk about, but she now tells us she is “delighted with her” and feels they have a brilliant relationship. She looks forward to the visits each week and talks to her family regularly about her.

Rose was due to spend Christmas day alone last year, due to her family circumstances. However instead, she spent it with her befriender and her befriender’s family, having Christmas dinner in a local restaurant.

The relationships built through befriending are special and powerful and we are incredibly grateful for those who give of their time to make this difference.

I know that there are many in this church who keep in touch with people in their neighbourhood and offer friendship and company and practical help.

It might be that the Befriending model could help us to expand this good work and make sure that people like Rose in our community don’t fall through the net or get overlooked. People who befriend others gain as much from the relationship as those who are cared for.

One of the things that struck me about CrossReach was the very high rate of satisfaction expressed by the clients of all ages and from all walks of life in the services provided, especially in the area of values.

99 per cent of people providing feedback said that `

the service respects me
the service treats me with dignity
the service treats me fairly
the service treats me well

There is something so Godly about that. Jesus calls us to respect others, to treat others with dignity and fairly, to treat others well.

To love our neighbours as ourselves.

Let us remember the words of Isaiah 61:1 – **The Spirit of the Sovereign Lord is on me, because the Lord has anointed me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent me to bind up the broken-hearted, to proclaim freedom for the captives and release from darkness for the prisoners.**

May CrossReach and all those who work in Christ's name continue to bind up the broken hearted for many years to come and may we be equipped to fulfill the mission statement of CrossReach in our own community as "in Christ's name we seek to support people to achieve the highest quality of life which they are capable of achieving at any given time."

AMEN