Sermon - To heal the broken–hearted

‘When you go home...... tell them of us and say....... for your tomorrow we gave our today.......’ that’s the Kohima Epitaph....... last week at the end of the silence....... I heard those words ... and wondered what will be my epitaph..... Those young men..... were called to war..... and didn’t have the chance to serve in any other way.....

It’s a good place to start when considering the theme of Public Service.... And today particularly the public service of health care.....My title ‘to heal the broken hearted’ comes from the Jesus manifesto .... His statement of intent..... In Luke chapter 4 in the synagogue he picks up the scroll and reads.... From Isiah 61 our first reading today...... and proclaimed that ‘Today This scripture has been fulfilled in your presence’

Disciples of Christ are called to this.... His hearers neither understood him nor liked what they heard.... And so it is for modern day disciples... in an age and culture which is self-centred... accumulation of personal wealth is revered no matter how it is earned.....
If you opt to work in the NHS you ain’t going to be rich…. Our present economic model does not value service….. compassion… binding up the broken hearted… healing the sick…. Setting the prisoner free… the comforting of those who mourn… these things can’t be measured in a balance sheet…. Or a salary

Christians are called to be more Christ like…. St Paul in his letter to the Philippians… describes Christ Jesus, who, though he was in the form of God, did not regard equality with God as something to be exploited, but emptied himself, taking the form of a servant, being born in human likeness.’ And Jesus said of himself… I have come not to be served but to serve…..

Oxford students are supremely privileged with opportunities to hone your God given intellect to become some of the sharpest thinkers in the world…… you will be offered great prospects…. financial rewards…. Supreme, wealth and power…. How will these make you more Christ like? Those called to war to protect our liberty didn’t have time to choose…..

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A good question is ‘Am I going to exploit my God given talent and opportunity for my own ends or in God’s service?

Before I realised my call to be a Christian... I worked in the Banking industry... Banking made me financially very rich..... but left me with a deeply troubled conscience.... Eventually in a place of despair I found myself in a Church.... I have not time to describe what happened that day...... but to the shock of my peers parents and family it led to me to become a Christian....abandon banking ant be ordained.... To become a servant of God, God’s world and the church...

Daily I have tested all that I do against the Jesus manifesto..... what am I doing for the captive... the oppressed... the mourning... the broken hearted.... And it has led me to my present work.... as a Hospice Chaplain.... With people who think they are dying people who are dying....... people whose loved ones are dying with staff who care for the dying...... sounds pretty miserable doesn’t it.....
People ask how I cope with it all….. and are shocked by the answer….. Its the best job I have ever had….. you cant value it in monetary terms… I make no contribution to anyone’s balance sheet and it is the worst paid job I ever had…. I got more as a Vicar….. I love the hospice because it is a place where we give people their lives back even for a little while… it is a place of joy and resurrection……

Death is over medicalised…. Its not a medical event with some social and spiritual issues that need to be managed…. Its a deeply spiritual a deeply social event…… it affects all around the bed…. Pain is not just a physical thing…. It’s spiritual…. People come in broken at the prospect of their own death or a loved one’s death…… they come with loads of existential angst…… a million and one questions… anger at the situation….. denial of the reality of mortality…. Suffering is the gap between where you find yourself and where you wish you were…..

So I work with the multi-disciplinary team of Social workers, Art and Music Therapists Physio and Occupation Therapists Psychiatrists, nurses oh yes and Doctors with one purpose… to bring about quality of living and peace in dying....
No matter how sick they matter right up until they die...... and beyond..... for some it’s a place of resurrection but once their symptoms are managed they go out to live......

Never have I heard a patient say they wished they had spent more time at work or made a bit more money.... Many wish they had spent more time with family or friends and doing something positive for the world......

So as each of us considers a potential life of public service..... There are many options.... But don’t dismiss the health service.... We need more Doctors.....nurses pharmacists, medical engineers, radiologists.... Ah yes and more chaplains..... all are involved in healing of the broken hearted....

In deciding how we might serve we can look at the Jesus manifesto... and the Philippians passage..... and consider whether what we are choosing will contribute to the fulfilment of Jesus’ purpose...... Are we prepared to make the sacrifice and to serve the public good? If you take his road you may not get wealthy in the worlds eyes .... But you are more likely to find joy and contentment....
And at your life’s end know that your legacy is the
good you have done through your service..... and
hear the words ‘well done my true and faithful
servant....’

Amen.