

21st September 2020

Whole

“Not only is there but one way of *doing* things rightly, but there is only one way of *seeing* them, and that is, seeing the whole of them.”

John Ruskin, The Two Paths

If Ruskin is right about seeing *things* as a whole, this is also important in the way we deal with each other.

Margaret Paterson was a lady in my first congregation. Maggie, as she was known, was a spinster in her early nineties. Housebound and no longer able to attend church, she was still committed to her congregation, engaged in a deeply devotional life and incredibly supportive of her minister. When I learned she'd been admitted to hospital, I went to visit right away and tracked her down to the old Edinburgh Royal Infirmary, a rambling hospital in the centre of the city. She was in a “Nightingale Ward”, a huge expanse with lots of beds down each side, stretching far into the distance. I couldn't see Maggie anywhere, so I approached the Nursing Station to enquire. The nurse was busy, so I waited till she finished what she was doing, then asked, “Excuse me. I'm looking for Miss Margaret Paterson. I'm her minister, and I'd like to spend a few minutes with her, if that's OK.” The nurse picked up a clip-board, ran her finger down a column of names, then said, “Ah yes! Paterson. That's the pancreas in the end bed on the right.” *The pancreas in the end bed!* Maggie Paterson had been reduced to one part of her anatomy. Surely she deserved more than that!

Surely *everyone* deserves more than that. And yet how quick we are to reduce people to one part of what they are: a diseased part; a deformed part; a personality part; a history part; a character part; a residential part; an employment part; a skin-colour part; a country-of-origin part; a broken part. We are all the sum of different parts, but each of us is a whole person, unique in our own way. Is that not worthy of acceptance and celebration?

Jesus promised us “Life in all its fullness.” We can begin to know that when we're more accepting of the fullness of life in the people around us, and when we can say, like Ruskin, we're “seeing the whole of them”.

A prayer for today

Lord, you see the whole of me and love the whole of me. Help me to see the wholeness of others and to learn to love them as you do. Amen.

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