



Creating a space to talk and listen



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Much of my work is done within the context of suffering – in the church, hospital and hospice, where people are going through so much pain and sorrow. Illness, tests, treatments, terminal diagnosis, dying and bereavement. All of us experience these eventually – times when we can feel crushed and broken.

In Philippians 3:10 Paul says: "...that I may know him and the power of his resurrection, and may share in his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, that by any means possible I may attain the resurrection from the dead." Trouble, pain and suffering can transform us if we allow it and we can become more like Jesus. While there may be questions about suffering that are not easy to answer, many people I visit are so brave and courageous as they endure so much physically, and as they face up to their illness and possibly death. Often, there is a desire on their part to make amends with others and with God, to be less judgmental, more accepting – even in their suffering they express much love and compassion to those around them. They are so appreciative of the kindness and care they are receiving.

Jesus told us that in this world we will have trouble (John 16:33). He also told a parable about two houses: one built on sand, the other on rock. The winds came and beat on both houses, the rain pelted down and, well, we know which house stood firm – the one built on rock (Matthew 7:24–27). Our rock is Jesus. We don't fall with a great crash like the house built on sand.

As a deaconess, and also in chaplaincy, we can create a safe space for people to talk about their pain and suffering and we can support and accompany them in it. It doesn't lessen their pain in the storm, but they don't feel alone and abandoned in it.

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In listening, we can hear soul talk – we can provide a space where suffering is not judged or minimised, but heard and acknowledged, as well as giving opportunities for the gospel and prayer.

Did you know that there is a difference between empathy and sympathy? Sympathy expresses concern through a doorway; empathy enters the place of suffering to offer companionship and hope there.

Suffering can be transformational – we follow one who was despised, rejected, a man of sorrow and familiar with grief. Suffering may seem pointless but we are not alone in it – God is with us and he is at work. Above all, we have that anticipation of resurrection power and life promised to all through faith in Jesus Christ.

Please pray:

- For the congregational life and witness of First Broughshane Presbyterian Church.
- For those who work and serve in Causeway Hospital.
- For all involved in caring for patients in the NI Hospice.