

Can I remind you . . .

Reminders are strange things.

They have the important task of telling us something we already know, but may have forgotten. There are reminders to renew memberships, change passwords, attend meetings. There are reminders by phone and email; some we set for ourselves and some that are set for us by others. There are even reminders that remind us to respond to the reminder! And yet in this world of reminders there are some so stark and simple and true it is extraordinary that we could forget them for even a day.

Life is hard

This is the opening sentence of M. Scott Peck's bestseller *The Road Less Travelled*. 'Life is hard' must be one of the most obvious and incontrovertible statements you could ever find; there is nothing original, inventive or creative in it. Everyone would agree life is not a gentle stroll in dappled sunlight; an endless autumn afternoon. No matter what our choices in life, or the privilege and opportunity we might be born into, life is hard. This is what could be called a basic truth, and it's probably one that everyone over fifteen has said themselves, more than once. Being reminded of it though, at particular points in our life, can be the occasion for healing.

I recently read of a woman whose experience of being childless made her feel constantly excluded from what had become an imagined paradise. 'Motherhood' was the only place where life had meaning, where love could be real, and where her identity as a woman could be complete. While walking her dog she fell into conversation with another woman who shared some of the pain and estrangement and heartache that existed between her and her children. The imagined paradise of parenthood was no more. She could again see the simple, obvious truth – life is hard. The reminder had done its job.

I read this story as the flu flicked and bounced between the six members of my family like something in a pinball machine. Amidst fevers and coughs and an unspeakable number of tissues it was another simple truth I needed to be reminded of – being family is strength and blessing.

As a Chaplain my role often requires that I formally and publically, in an official kind of way, state the bleeding obvious. A couple of weeks ago I led a funeral for a man who had died after years of battling mental and physical health problems. His four children sat alone in the front row of the chapel. I began with a reminder.

“We are gathered here today because this man's life mattered”

And the tears began.