Sunday 25th October 2026: Benefice Holy Communion, Gilling

Tomorrow marks the beginning of a week where chaplaincy teams, doctors, nurses, carers and volunteers in all sorts of contexts promote the benefits of pastoral and spiritual care.

We heard last Sunday about St Luke, the beloved physician and so we continue today thinking about how we all are called to minister to others to care for their souls, minds and bodies in any way we can.

These actions are summed up in our Gospel reading today, "You shall love your neighbour as yourself." It is what is described in ministry as "the cure of souls".

Paul's words in today's Epistle do not describe pastoral care as management, performance, or religious professionalism. He describes a ministry shaped by courage, gentleness, integrity, and love. The heart of the passage is found in verse 8: Paul and his companions cared so deeply for the believers that they were ready to share not only the gospel of God, but their very lives. That is spiritual care at its richest: truth offered through a life that is present, open, and lovingly given.

Pastoral care begins with the Gospel. Paul never separates compassion from the good news of Jesus Christ. People need more than sympathy; they need hope grounded in God's saving grace. Yet the gospel must not be delivered coldly, as though ministry were merely the transfer of information. The message of Christ is carried by people whose conduct reflects Christ. When a pastor, elder, friend, or church member listens patiently, speaks honestly, prays faithfully, and remains present in difficulty, the gospel becomes visible as well as audible.

This verse shows that spiritual care is deeply relational. Paul says, "You became dear to us." He did not see the

Thessalonians as a project, an audience, or a problem to solve. He saw people loved by God and precious to him. This challenges every form of detached ministry. We may organise programmes, preach sermons, visit homes, or offer counsel, but if people do not sense that they matter, our care will feel hollow. Genuine pastoral care looks beyond the presenting need and recognises, and loves, the person.

Paul also speaks of sharing "our lives." This is not a call to unhealthy boundaries or to making every private matter public, but to sincere presence. Spiritual carers walk beside those who suffer, offering time, attention, prayer and appropriate vulnerability. Care may mean sharing Scripture, sitting quietly with grief, remembering a name, making a call, preparing a meal, or returning when the crisis is no longer visible. However it is expressed, it must be grounded in prayer.

The surrounding verses show the character required for such care. Paul rejects deception, flattery, greed and the search for praise. Pastoral ministry cannot nurture souls when driven by ego, control, self-centredness or gossip; spiritual authority is trustworthy only when it serves. Carers must examine their motives before God, respect confidentiality and refuse to exploit another's weakness. The question is not, "How will this make me appear?" but, "What will help this person receive the grace and peace of Christ?"

Paul's compares this to a nursing mother caring for her children. Pastoral care listens before advising, asks thoughtful questions and makes room for tears, doubt, silence and slow growth. It also recognises when specialised help is needed.

This passage also speaks to the whole church. Pastoral and spiritual care are not the responsibility of ordained ministers alone. Every believer can help create a community in which no one suffers unseen. We can notice

who is absent, welcome those at the edges, bear one another's burdens, pray with persistence, and speak words that strengthen faith. A caring congregation does not treat people as interruptions. It understands that sharing life together is part of its witness. The church becomes credible when proclaimed grace is matched by practised love.

So let us hear the invitation of verse 8. Let us share the gospel clearly, without embarrassment or compromise and share our lives generously, without pretence or self-importance. May our words announce Christ and our presence reflect him. May those who are lonely find companionship, those who are wounded find gentleness, those who are confused find patient guidance, and those who are weary find hope.

Thaks be to God. Amen.