

# Sinking Slowly?

**H**ot. Smelly. Busy. Expensive. Such were my friends' recollections of Venice. Not mine, however. I had visions of tall, ramshackle brightly coloured buildings teetering elegantly on stilts above the cool, clear water of quiet, meandering canals. The rose tinted memories of an eager ten year old perhaps (some 20 years on), remembering her first experiences of continental Europe. So I suppose that I might have been disappointed on my recent return there, yet I wasn't. That is, I was neither prepared to be, nor was I disappointed. Away from the crowds of the main tourist areas Venice was just as I remembered, with but one exception. The absence of stilts, already hidden as evidenced by the water lapping at the edges of San Marco square (despite a drought ridden summer) were an all too real reminder that Venice is slowly, but surely sinking.

Like most people, however, not all my childhood memories are so pleasant and carefree. I have my share of heartache with which the past's horizon is marred and the future will be enriched. Yet they are nothing compared with some of the trail of broken hearts and twisted lives that visit my surgery on a daily basis, usually timed perfectly to coincide with my nephew's birthday party or some other family event which, this time as always, I had promised faithfully not to miss.

Not that I would change that. Medicine is not just a science, or even an art. It is perhaps, for some at least, a vocation, but for all of us it is a privilege. The depth of the trust of the young woman who whilst asking for contraception, tentatively discloses a history of abuse. The burly HGV driver who breaks into tears at the thought that his licence and livelihood are about to be lost. The sharing of grief with the recently bereaved who thank you endlessly for doing your best when somehow you can't help feeling this is just when you have failed them most.

Like all privileges however it carries with it burdens. Like rights and responsibilities the two go hand in hand. For some it seems that is too much, as the growing trend of disillusioned doctors only serves to testify, as more and more leave the profession for which they trained so hard. I count myself fortunate not to be among them, as yet, not to be sinking slowly, like Venice, under the burgeoning paperwork and continuing political wrangling. For me medicine is undoubtedly still a privilege, an opportunity to show the human face of the love that God so caringly showed us in sacrificing his only Son. For of that I do not have rose-tinted memories but a divine directive to remember the new covenant:

*'This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins.'* (Matthew 26:28).

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