



CHRISTUS REX

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We are called to love, worship and obey God; to put His love into practice in the power of the Holy Spirit through our witness and service, that all may know Christ our King

A Lenten Meditation by Pope Francis The Meaning of the COVID-19 pandemic and its implications for humanity

"When evening had come" (Mark 4:35). The Gospel passage we have just heard begins like this. For weeks now it has been evening. Thick darkness has gathered over our squares, our streets and our cities; it has taken over our lives, filling everything with a deafening silence and a distressing void, that stops everything as it passes by; we feel it in the air, we notice in people's gestures, their glances give them away. We find ourselves afraid and lost. Like the disciples in the Gospel we were caught off guard by an unexpected, turbulent storm. We have realized that we are on the same boat, all of us fragile and disoriented, but at the same time important and needed, all of us called to row together, each of us in need of comforting the other. On this boat... are all of us. Just like those disciples, who spoke anxiously with one voice, saying "We are perishing" (v. 38), so we too have realized that we cannot go on thinking of ourselves, but only together can we do this.

It is easy to recognize ourselves in this story. What is harder to understand is Jesus' attitude. While his disciples are quite naturally alarmed and desperate, he stands in the stern, in the part of the boat that sinks first. And what does he do? In spite of the tempest, he sleeps on soundly, trusting in the Father; this is the only time in the Gospels we see Jesus sleeping. When he wakes up, after calming the wind and the waters, he turns to the disciples in a reproaching voice: "Why are you afraid? Have you no faith?" (v. 40).

Let us try to understand. In what does the lack of the disciples' faith consist, as contrasted with Jesus' trust? They had not stopped believing in him; in fact, they called on him. But we see how they call on him: "Teacher, do you not care if we perish?" (v. 38). Do you not care: they think that Jesus is not interested in them, does not care about them. One of the things that hurts us and our families most when we hear it said is: "Do you not care about me?" It is a phrase that wounds and unleashes storms in our hearts. It would have shaken Jesus too. Because he, more than anyone, cares about us. Indeed, once they have called on him, he saves his disciples from their discouragement.

The storm exposes our vulnerability and uncovers those false and superfluous certainties around which we have constructed our daily schedules, our projects, our habits and priorities. It shows us how we have allowed to become dull and feeble the very things that nourish, sustain and strengthen our lives and our communities. The tempest lays bare all our pre-packaged ideas and forgetfulness of what nourishes our people's souls; all those attempts that anesthetize us with ways of thinking and acting that supposedly "save" us, but instead prove incapable of putting us in touch with our roots and keeping alive the memory of those who have gone before us. We deprive ourselves of the antibodies we need to confront adversity.

In this storm, the façade of those stereotypes with which we camouflaged our egos, always worrying about our image, has fallen away, uncovering once more that (blessed) common belonging, of which we cannot be deprived: our belonging as brothers and sisters.

"Why are you afraid? Have you no faith?" Lord, your word this evening strikes us and regards us, all of us. In this world, that you love more than we do, we have gone ahead at breakneck speed, feeling powerful and able to do anything. Greedy for profit, we let ourselves get caught up in things, and lured away by haste. We did not stop at your reproach to us, we were not shaken awake by wars or injustice across the world, nor did we listen to the cry of the poor or of our ailing planet. We carried on regardless, thinking we would stay healthy in a world that was sick. Now that we are in a stormy sea, we implore you: "Wake up, Lord!"

"Why are you afraid? Have you no faith?" Lord, you are calling to us, calling us to faith. Which is not so much believing that you exist but coming to you and trusting in you. This Lent your call reverberates urgently: "Be converted!", "Return to me with all your heart" (Joel 2:12). You are calling on us to seize this time of trial as a time of choosing. It is not the time of your judgement, but of our judgement: a time to choose what matters and what passes away, a time to separate what is necessary from what is not. It is a time to get our lives back on track with regard to you, Lord, and to others. We can look to so many exemplary companions for the journey, who, even though fearful, have reacted by giving their lives. This is the force of the Spirit poured out and fashioned in courageous and generous self-denial. It is the life in the Spirit that can redeem, value and demonstrate how our lives are woven together and sustained by ordinary people – often forgotten people – who do not appear in newspaper and magazine headlines nor on the grand catwalks of the latest show, but who without any doubt are in these very days writing the decisive events of our time: doctors, nurses, supermarket employees, cleaners, caregivers, providers of transport, law and order forces, volunteers, priests, religious men and women and so very many others who have understood that no one reaches salvation by themselves. In the face of so much suffering, where the authentic development of our peoples is assessed, we experience the priestly prayer of Jesus: "That they may all be one" (Jn 17:21). How many people every day are exercising patience and offering hope, taking care to sow not panic but a shared responsibility. How many fathers, mothers, grandparents and teachers are showing our children, in small everyday gestures, how to face up to and navigate a crisis by adjusting their routines, lifting their gaze and fostering prayer. How many are praying, offering and interceding for the good of all. Prayer and quiet service: these are our victorious weapons.

"Why are you afraid? Have you no faith?" Faith begins when we realise we are in need of salvation. We are not self-sufficient; by ourselves we flounder: we need the Lord, like ancient navigators needed the stars. Let us invite Jesus into the boats of our lives. Let us hand over our fears to him so that he can conquer them. Like the disciples, we will experience that with him on board there will be no shipwreck. Because this is God's strength: turning to the good everything that happens to us, even the bad things. He brings serenity into our storms, because with God life never dies.

The Lord asks us and, in the midst of our tempest, invites us to reawaken and put into practice that solidarity and hope capable of giving strength, support and meaning to these hours when everything seems to be floundering. The Lord awakens so as to reawaken and revive our Easter faith. We have an anchor: by his cross we have been saved. We have a rudder: by his cross we have been redeemed. We have a hope: by his cross we have been healed and embraced so that nothing and no one can separate us from his redeeming love. In the midst of isolation when we are suffering from a lack of tenderness and chances to meet up, and we experience the loss of so many things, let us once again listen to the proclamation that saves us: he is risen and is living by our side. The Lord asks us from his cross to rediscover the life that awaits us, to look towards those who look to us, to strengthen, recognize and foster the grace that lives within us. Let us not quench the wavering flame (cf. Is 42:3) that never falters: and let us allow hope to be rekindled.

Embracing his cross means finding the courage to embrace all the hardships of the present time, abandoning for a moment our eagerness for power and possessions in order to make room for the creativity that only the Spirit is capable of inspiring. It means finding the courage to create spaces where everyone can recognize that they are called, and to allow new forms of hospitality, fraternity and solidarity. By his cross we have been saved in order to embrace hope and let it strengthen and sustain all measures and all possible avenues for helping us protect ourselves and others. Embracing the Lord in order to embrace hope: that is the strength of faith, which frees us from fear and gives us hope.

"*Why are you afraid? Have you no faith?*"? Dear brothers and sisters, from this place that tells of Peter's rock-solid faith, I would like this evening to entrust all of you to the Lord, through the intercession of Mary, Health of the People and Star of the stormy Sea. From this colonnade that embraces Rome and the whole world, may God's blessing come down upon you as a consoling embrace. Lord, may you bless the world, give health to our bodies and comfort our hearts. You ask us not to be afraid. Yet our faith is weak, and we are fearful. But you, Lord, will not leave us at the mercy of the storm. Tell us again: "Do not be afraid" (Mt 28:5). And we, together with Peter, "cast all our anxieties onto you, for you care about us" (cf. 1 Pet 5:7).

[Lent Homily and Blessing delivered by Pope Francis on 27 March 2020 in St. Peter's Square]

The Christian ministry of healing

A carefully designed comprehensive study process, initiated by the World Council of Churches' Christian Medical Commission in the nineteen seventies and eighties, showed that many factors or influences are responsible for forms of illness and broken relationships. Feelings of void and lack of spiritual orientation in people's lives; weakening of the natural defences of the body to defend oneself from infections or bio-chemical disturbances in bodily functions or other forms of physical, emotional, or mental disorders; imbalance in the flow of energy, leading to obstruction and manifestation of dis-ease; enslavement or addiction to evil desires or influences that hinder the person's response to God's saving grace.

According to the biblical-theological tradition of the church, the human being is a "multidimensional unity". Body, soul and mind are not separate entities, but inter-related and inter-dependent. Therefore, *health has physical, psychological and spiritual dimensions*. The individual being is also part of the community, health has also a social dimension. And because of the interaction between the natural environment (biosphere) and persons or communities, health has even an ecological dimension.

This has led the World Council of Churches to offer the following definition of health:

Health is a dynamic state of well-being of the individual and society, of physical, mental, spiritual, economic, political, and social well-being - of being in harmony with each other, with the material environment and with God.

[Eds. Note: The World Health Organisation has a similar understanding of health:

Health is a state of complete physical, mental and social well-being and not merely the absence of disease or other physical impairment.]

Such a holistic view underlines that health is not a static concept in which clear distinction lines are drawn between those who are healthy and those who are not. Every human being is constantly moving between different degrees of staying healthy and of struggling with infections and diseases. Such an understanding of health is close to the one emerging in the recent debate and research on health promoting factors.

Such a holistic view has also consequences on the understanding of the church's mission. The Christian ministry of healing includes both the practice of medicine (addressing both physical and mental health) as well as caring and counselling disciplines and spiritual practices. Repentance, prayer and/or laying on of hands, divine healing, rituals involving touch and tenderness, forgiveness and the sharing of the eucharist can have important and at times even dramatic effects in the physical as well as social realm of human beings. All the different means are part of God's work in creation and presence in the church. Contemporary scientific medicine as well as other medical approaches make use of what is available in the world God has created. Healing through 'medical means' is not to be thought of as inferior (or even unnecessary) to healing through other, or by 'spiritual' means.

To be a reconciling and healing community is an essential expression of the mission of the church to create and renew relationships in the perspective of the kingdom of God. This means to proclaim Christ's grace and forgiveness, to heal bodies, minds, souls and to reconcile broken communities in the perspective of fullness of life (John 10:10).

The local congregation or Christian community is a primary agent for healing. While recognising the need and legitimacy of specialized Christian institutions like hospitals, primary health services and special healing homes every Christian community - as the body of Christ - has a healing significance and relevance. The way people are received, welcomed and treated in a local community has a deep impact on its healing function. The way a network of mutual support, of listening and of mutual care is maintained and nurtured in a local congregation expresses the healing power of the church as a whole. All basic functions of the local church have a healing dimension also for the wider community: the proclamation of the word of God as a message of hope and comfort, the celebration of the Eucharist as a sign of reconciliation and restoration, the pastoral ministry of each believer, individual or community intercessory prayer for all members and the sick in particular. Each individual member in a local congregation has a unique gift to contribute to the overall healing ministry of the church.

[Extracts from World Council of Churches, *The Healing Mission of the Church*

<https://www.oikoumene.org/resources/documents/preparatory-paper-ndeg-11-the-healing-mission-of-the-church>]

Diseases of the Bible

A disease is a definite entity of sickness of part or all of the body, with a characteristic group of symptoms. It is likely that the Hebrews were subject to the same diseases that are prevalent in the semitropical climate of the mid-East today. However, in many cases the Bible only

mentions symptoms, such as fever, haemorrhage, discharge or itch, and one can only surmise what the disease entity was.

In this series on the diseases of the Bible and their symptoms they will appear in alphabetical order: this month H to L:

Hemorrhage. In Luke 8:42-48 we have the account of a woman who had a flow ("issue" KJV) of blood for twelve years. Was this rectal or vaginal bleeding? In a primitive, semi-tropical country like Israel, there were many cases of bloody diarrhoea and dysentery. The woman's trouble may have been a recurrent or chronic attack of one of these.

It is generally assumed, and probably correctly so, that it was vaginal bleeding. If so, we would like to know approximately how old she was. If forty years, or less, she might have been concerned not only about the messiness of her condition, plus the loss of strength and weight, but also about the fact that she was unable to bear children—something that the women of that day took very seriously.

It is not likely that it was a continuous flow of blood. If it were, she would not have lived twelve years with it. More likely it was a frequently recurring experience. A common cause of this would be hormone imbalance. Her ovaries could have been secreting too much oestrogen. Her menstrual periods would then have been prolonged and profuse, or they might have occurred more than once a month.

It has been suggested that fibroid tumours were the cause of her trouble. Many women have such tumours—most of the time without abnormal bleeding. Much depends on the location and size of the tumours. They may occur on the outer surface of the uterus. They may be smaller than marbles or larger than grapefruit.

Another frequent location is within the muscular walls of the uterus, expanding the uterus until at times it fills the pelvis like a wedge. In such cases constipation or distressing frequency in passing urine may be experienced, as well as heavy bleeding.

Carcinoma must be expected in every case of chronic vaginal bleeding. The focus of the disease is usually in the cervix of the uterus. The cervix becomes ragged and cancer may develop in this area, spreading later to the body of the uterus and neighbouring glands. It is not likely that the woman healed by Jesus had cancer, however. If that were the case, she would probably have died before twelve years went by.

Impediment of speech. This physical difficulty is mentioned in Mark 7:32, "and they brought to him a man who was deaf and had an impediment in his speech."

"Aphasia" is such an impediment and it appears in many forms. For example, some persons are at a total loss for words when they smell something and want to give expression to their reaction. Others have the same experience when it concerns tasting food. Others have what is called "amnesic aphasia." They cannot recall certain words that ordinarily are completely familiar to them. Then there are those with motor aphasia—people who know what they want to say but cannot utter the words because the muscles of mouth and face refuse to respond. Persons with gibberish aphasia speak words and phrases that make no sense. People who stutter also have a real impediment of speech.

There are impediments of speech due to abnormalities of the face or mouth, such as a severe tongue tie, or hare lip, or a face which is badly scarred.

A rather common impediment of speech is known as auditory aphasia. Persons who were born deaf, or became deaf in early childhood—perhaps as a complication of measles—do not know what speech sounds like, and, excepting in rare cases, either do not try to talk at all, or

speak with difficulty and lack of clarity. This was probably the case of the man who was healed by Jesus, as it is recorded that he was also deaf.

Indigestion. Paul writes to Timothy “no longer drink only water, but use a little wine for the sake of your stomach and your frequent ailments” (1 Tim 5:23).

The digestive processes of the body are more evidence of the wonderful way the Lord has fashioned us. As soon as food enters the mouth, digestion starts. Our saliva contains an enzyme called “ptyalin” which starts the digestion of carbohydrates. When the food gets to the stomach, some of the carbohydrate digestion continues, but proteins get the major attention and are broken up by pepsin and hydrochloric acid. After the stomach has completed its job, the partly digested food seeps through the pylorus into the duodenum and small intestine. Here several additional digestants get to work, including secretions from the liver and pancreas. Millions of villi—like microscopic hairs—extend from the inner surface of the bowel, absorb the digested food, and pass it on to the blood and lymph vessels.

Wine is a stimulant, and its sugar content also has a tonic effect. So Paul advises Timothy to use a little of it instead of water. The word “little” is interesting. Paul did not want to give the impression of advocating any large use of wine.

Timothy was evidently not strong physically. Paul does not say why. Improper diet and nervous strain may have been factors. At all events, Timothy did not have an ulcer of the stomach or duodenum, for then wine would have been contraindicated.

Infirmity. John 5:5 (KJV) tells of a man at the pool of Bethesda who “had an infirmity thirty and eight years.” Infirmity is a word with a very broad meaning and may refer to any disease of the body, or abnormality in its structure. The implication seems to be that something happened to him thirty-eight years previously and left him with a residual incapacity so severe that he is unable to compete successfully with other diseased or handicapped people in getting into the healing pool of water.

This could well have been a paralysis dating back to an attack of polio in his youth. In many cases of polio both legs are left completely and permanently paralyzed. Other extremities and organs of the body may also be involved. If his infirmity had been a continuous illness, it would in all probability have run its course in far less than thirty-eight years and ended in either recovery or death.

Inflammation. Germs, especially streptococci and staphylococci are always present on the surface of our bodies. Surgeons are well aware of this, and before they perform an operation they scrub their hands with a stiff brush and plenty of soap to get them as free as possible of these germs.

The first defence against these organisms is the skin itself. Skin consists of several layers of cells packed closely together and gives excellent protection against germs.

If that skin is bruised or cut, germs immediately get in and start multiplying. They promptly encounter a second line of defence. Leucocytes (white cells) that attack the invaders.

Leucocytes are so called because, when looked at through a microscope, they appear transparent, in contrast with the iron-laden red blood cells. They are of various types, and each kind has its own job to do.

Leucocytes are always present in the body by billions. If you can imagine a tiny cube 1 mm. in size, think of it, when filled with blood, as containing about 5,000,000 red cells and about 6,000 leucocytes. These leucocytes are constantly on patrol throughout the body. They are

present in every organ and even in the stroma between the cells of body structures. They are continuously on the watch for foreign invaders and for any debris that may be floating along.

After a bruise or cut, the leucocytes attack invading organisms. Most of the time they win their battle with relative ease and the patient does not take his injury seriously. Sometimes, when the invaders are particularly virile or numerous, they win the first battle. The call goes out immediately for additional leucocytes held in reserve in bone marrow. Within hours, the leucocyte army will not only be doubled, but new ones by the billions will go into production.

At the site of infection, some leucocytes will absorb the invaders by a process known as phagocytosis. Microscopic examination has shown that a single leucocyte will absorb (eat) as many as 20 invaders, and some have been seen to engulf up to 100 of them. The germs are digested by the leucocytes and unwanted remnants are excreted.

As a result of this struggle, there will be inflammation with localized heat, swelling and pain. A pocket of pus may result from the debris of battle. The leucocytes can be aided by allowing the pus to escape. As healing takes place, other leucocytes (trash collectors) take the debris away. Liver and spleen are the principal organs for filtering the unwanted material from the blood. Some of it is used to manufacture new cells (re-cycling), and the balance goes primarily to the kidneys for excretion. The inflammation may be localized, as in a single boil, or appear in multiple lesions, as predicted in Deuteronomy 28:27, and experienced by Job.

Insanity (Matt 4:24 KJV; *madness*, blindness and confusion of mind, Deut 28:28).

Insanity is an unpleasant word. Many persons think of it in the words of Proverbs 26:18—“like a madman who throws firebrands, arrows and death.” It is, however, an illness of degrees, and is the result of a defect in part or all of the brain.

Insanity (lunacy, dementia) may be unrecognized in its early stages. It may start with a loss of mental alertness, loss of energy, difficulty in remembering, especially concerning recent events, or the patient may have trouble connecting words so they make sense. He may become lost easily, show poor judgment, become depressed, gloomy, anxious, irritable, and fearful that someone is trying to hurt him (paranoia). He fails to take care of himself and may have to be given nursing care. His trouble may go on to total disorientation.

There is a form of dementia called Alzheimer’s disease. It starts in middle life and is the result of gradual deterioration of the cerebral cortex. It is characterized by disorder in gait, disorientation, and hallucinations. Death usually occurs in from five to eight years. This disease is of special interest because the deterioration of the brain is similar to that seen in senility.

What brings on insanity? Perhaps the greatest factor is heredity. In some cases excessive use of drugs such as barbiturates, alcohol, marijuana, and heroin may have caused the damage to the brain. Certain illnesses, such as syphilis, pernicious anaemia, epilepsy, malaria, plague and typhoid fever may be responsible. Arteriosclerosis, cerebral haemorrhage, and injury are relatively common causes. The madness predicted in Deuteronomy will result from inability of the people to cope with overwhelming disaster.

Itch. This is another of the curses with which the Lord threatened Israelites who departed from the faith (Deuteronomy 28:27). Itch is a discomfort with which the inhabitants of the sub-tropical mid-East were thoroughly familiar.

The chief culprit in producing itch is a tiny mite known as “*Sarcoptes Scabiei*” and the disease it generates is known as Scabies. The female in the Scabies family is the one who does all the hard work. She digs through the upper layer of skin and makes a burrow for her home. The burrow is short—just a small fraction of an inch—but it is a definite characteristic of Scabies. A clever dermatologist, with the aid of a magnifying glass, can pull the Scabies mite out of its

burrow. While in that burrow, the Scabies mite causes intense itching, esp. at night. The victimized person scratches desperately to relieve the itching, frequently digging through the skin and starting serious infection. The Scabies mite has a few favourite spots for burrowing. They include the inner surface of the wrist, the lower abdomen, and the glans penis.

The Scabies mite is stubborn and may exist for years (seven-year itch) in unclean, untreated individuals. It is prevalent in time of war and has been known to seriously handicap soldiers.

Lice also can make life miserable with their itching. There are three well known types—the head louse, the body louse, and the crab (or pubic) louse.

Leprosy was greatly feared by the Israelites, not only because of the physical damage done by the disease, but also because of the strict isolation laws applying to leprosy, making the patients feel like feared outcasts of society.

It was in 1873 that a Norwegian by the name of G. Armauer Hansen discovered a bacillus he called "Myobacterium leprae," which he found in nearly all cases of leprosy, and abundantly so in severe cases. The more euphonious term of "Hansen's disease" is now commonly used instead of leprosy.

Leprosy appears in two principal forms. The first, and by far the more dangerous, is called "lepromatous"; and the other, more benign type, is designated as "tuberculoid."

Both start with discoloration of a patch of skin. This patch may be white or pink. It is most likely to appear on the brow, nose, ear, cheek or chin. In a case of beginning leprosy with a whitish patch on the side of the abdomen the patient felt no pain whatever when the skin in this patch was repeatedly pierced by a needle.

In the lepromatous type of leprosy, the patch may spread widely in all directions. Portions of the eyebrows may disappear. Spongy, tumorlike swellings grow on the face and body. The disease becomes systemic and involves the internal organs as well as the skin. Marked deformity of hands and feet occur when the tissues between the bones deteriorate and disappear. Often the sensory nerve endings no longer respond to heat or injury and the unwary patient may be subject to further destruction of his limbs before he realizes his danger.

Leprosy is a long-lasting disease. Untreated cases may be sick with lepromatous leprosy from ten to twenty years, death occurring from the disease itself or from an invasion of the weakened body by tuberculosis or some other disease.

The tuberculoid type is less severe. As stated, it starts with a change of skin colour in a localized area. More such patches may follow, and each patch is characteristically surrounded by a low ridge. However, the tuberculoid type of leprosy tends to be limited and even untreated cases heal completely in from one to three years. What a wonderful feeling it must have been for such patients to return to their priest and be declared healed!

So far as we know, the Hebrews had no cure for leprosy other than divine intervention. In modern times, there are very effective medicines available, and leprosy patients are usually not isolated.

[Sources: <https://www.biblicaltraining.org/library/diseases-bible>]

R.I.P.

Since the last issue of Christus Rex two well-known and loved stalwarts of our parish have passed to their eternal rest. Thomas (Tom) Rhoda and Peter Welman will both be remembered fondly for the contributions they made to many aspects of parish life. Neither sought the lime-light but contributed service in many ways: both are sorely missed.

Answers to January Bible Quiz

Healing

Match the method with the person healed

- | | |
|---|--|
| 1. Jesus' fingers in ears and spit | e. Deaf man with speech impediment (Mark 7:33) |
| 2. Lump of figs. | j. Hezekiah's boils (Isaiah 38:21) |
| 3. Dip in Jordan River | g. Naaman (2 Kings 5:14) |
| 4. Touch by Jesus | f. Peter's mother in law. (Mark 1:30-31) |
| 5. Look at brass serpent | d. Israelites' snake bites (Numbers 21:9) |
| 6. Spoken word of Jesus | a. Centurion's servant (Matthew 8:13) |
| 7. Touch of Jesus' garment | h. Woman sick for 12 years (Mark 5:25-29) |
| 8. Dip in troubled waters of pool of Bethesda | i. People around pool (John 5:4) |
| 9. Prayer and laying on of hands | b. Publius' father (Acts 28:8) |
| 10. Faith of his friends | c. Man with palsy (Matthew 9:2) |

February Bible Quiz

Jesus' Healing Miracles

Match the miracle Jesus performed with the person for whom the miracle was performed

- | | |
|-------------------------------|---------------------------------|
| 1. A Royal Official | a. Fever healed |
| 2. Jairus | b. Son healed |
| 3. Bartimaeus | c. Received Sight |
| 4. High Priest's servant | d. Freed from her suffering |
| 5. Widow of Nain | e. Daughter raised from dead |
| 6. Mary and Martha | f. Son raised from the dead |
| 7. Peter's mother-in-law | g. Walked again |
| 8. An invalid for 38 years | h. Freed from demon |
| 9. A woman in the crowd | i. Brother raised from the dead |
| 10. Man chained hand and foot | j. Ear restored |

A Concluding Thought

The tragedy in the lives of most of us is that we go through life walking down a high-walled lane of people of our own kind, the same economic situation, the same national background and education and religious outlook. And beyond these walls, all humanity lies, unknown and unseen, and untouched by our restricted and impoverished lives.

- Florence Luscomb, suffragist 1887-1985

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