



Mental Health Sunday

Pentecost

May 20, 2018

*Acts 2:1-21 or Ezekiel 37:1-14 Psalm 104:24-34, 35b Romans 8:22-27 or Acts 2:1-21
John 15:26-27; 16:4b-15*

CALL TO WORSHIP: *(Based on Psalm 104)*

One: We gather in the presence of the One
who breathes life into all of Creation.

All: **We sing God's praises, breathing in God's glory.**

One: All are welcome in the presence of the Most High.

All: **We come,
seeking the goodness in the hands of God.**

One: We gather as God's beloved people,
leaving no one outside.

All: **Together we reflect the fullness of God's love;
together we bring God's love into the world.**

One: Let us worship the Living God whose breath gives us life.

PRAYER OF INVOCATION: *(Based on Romans 8)*

Holy One, be with us in this sacred space.

Stir your Spirit in and among us
as we offer our prayers and praises.

We long to hear more than the groaning of Creation around us,
more than our own fearful groaning.

From the places deep within us,
that we mistakenly believe are hidden from you,
may your Spirit intercede for us.

Draw us into your presence.

May we recognize you in ourselves and in our neighbors.

Let us see you through all brokenness
that we may find wholeness in being your body here and now.

In the name of the One who fills the world with Hope. **Amen.**

PRAYER OF CONFESSION: *(Based on Ezekiel 37)*

God of promise and possibility,
we come before you broken and breathless,
thinking we are trudging through a valley of lifeless bones.
We look for life amidst the bones and dust
and fail to notice your breath flowing in and around us.
We think we need to be perfect
before we can enter the new life you have for us.
We become fearful when illness in body, mind, or spirit
enters in to our lives or the lives of those around us.
We worry that sickness of body, that mental illness,
is a judgement from you.
We would rather walk in a valley of bones
than believe that your Love, your Spirit, claims us all –
in our brokenness and our wholeness.

Open us to the power of your Spirit,
a power that makes us all whole:
bone, sinew, and flesh filled with your breath.
Let us remember that you do not leave us alone
in a valley filled with dusty, dry bones;
You call us into new life, again and again.

WORDS OF ASSURANCE:

One: Hear the Good News:

No valley is too despairing, broken, or dusty for God to enter in.
No fear, no chaos, no hopelessness
is beyond the reach of the One whose breath gives us life.

All: **Through Christ, God sees only our wholeness.**

Through Christ, forgiveness, love, and new life are always possible.

One: Come, Holy Spirit, come. Make all things new.

All: **We are reclaimed and remade by the Spirit of Life.**

In our brokenness and in our wholeness we are God's beloved.

Thanks be to God. Amen.

SERMON STARTER: *Acts 2:1-21*

Have you ever really paid attention to this account of the first Pentecost? I mean really paid attention. It's a deeply unsettling story. Winds blowing open doors and flames dancing above heads, not to mention a babble of languages tumbling from familiar mouths. I don't think we listen well to this story.

We like the coming of the Holy Spirit part, but what of those disciples who appeared drunk to some of the onlookers? What of the weird and seemingly unholy happenings? We tend to dismiss them and focus on the good parts, the parts like all who call on the name of the Lord are saved. That sounds way better than holy heads on fire and uncontrollable winds and foreign languages tumbling out of familiar mouths.

Some would say that this passage only speaks of God's power and reminds us that the Holy Spirit is a Mystery and completely untamable. While this is true, this passage can have a whole lot more to say to us, especially on this Mental Health Sunday.

Let's begin with the last part – all who call on God are saved. Did you hear this? It says "all." There's no comment on right theology, right behavior, right thinking, right living. It also doesn't say that those who struggle with physical or mental illness have no place in the Body of Christ. This strange story of the first Pentecost reasserts that salvation, the Love of God shown in Christ, is for all people.

So what of people who struggle in ways we don't like to see, acknowledge, or experience? The church has remained silent for too long around the issues of mental illness. We tend to fall back on the idea that illness, particularly mental illness, is a punishment for sin, even if we don't intellectually believe this. This is how we act. That somehow people who live with mental illness don't have faith enough to be whole. The account of Pentecost in Acts indicates a whole different truth.

Imagine what we would say if somebody told us this story today. If someone came into our worship and said that they saw flames of fire above our heads, we might dismiss it as a hallucination. If they told us that they heard a sound of mighty and rushing wind, we might say the same thing. Then if they added that they heard us speaking in languages not our own, we would just shake our heads and turn away, if not back away in fear. And how wrong we would be!

Maybe we can consider the Pentecost story as invitation to welcome, include, support, and engage persons who live with mental illness. Let's face it, those disciples don't sound particularly well in this story. Yet, God did not abandon them. God didn't turn them away. God included them in the building of the early church. They might have had some unusual experiences and some unique ways of being in the world, but God used them to create the Body of Christ that we are all a part of.

What if this story isn't just a story about the mysteries of the Holy Spirit, but also a story of welcome? And if we add to this Ezekiel's vision of that dusty, despairing valley, we get such a powerful promise of inclusion and new life. No brokenness, no illness is beyond the reach of our God. The breath of the Spirit gives all of us life. God transforms our bony, broken, despairing lives by knitting us together into the Body of Christ. We can all find wholeness and hope when we come together in the name of the One who Loves us all...

A W.I.S.E. LITANY: (Welcoming, Inclusive, Supportive, Engaged)

One: On our own, we forget that we are a bundle of bones,
animated by the breath of God.

All: On our own, we forget that human ways lead to a dry and dusty valley.

One: When we remember God's promise of life and Love,

we can become more than we are.

All: When we remember the igniting power of the Holy Spirit,
we become alive again to follow God's Holy Ways.

One: Seeking to live in God's ways, means leaving fear behind and living in welcome.

All: Seeking to embody Love, means including all our neighbors,
especially those who are made vulnerable by mental illness.

One: As the Spirit sets us on fire once again,
we yearn to strengthen the Body of Christ
by reaching out to those who experience the world
as a place where chaos and confusion often reign.

All: As the Spirit opens our hearts,
we strive to be a community of love and support
for those who live with mental illness.

One: We hear the groan of Creation.
We feel it in our own lives.

We hide our fears of inadequacy and our sense of brokenness deep within,
forgetting that God is present in the depths as well as the heights.

All: As we groan with the whole of Creation,
waiting for God's healing grace,
we commit to sharing our whole selves with God and one another.
We will engage each other, with friends, with family, and with our neighbors,
leaving no one out,
especially those who have been stigmatized because of mental illness.

One: On this Pentecost Sunday, we celebrate the amazing power of the Spirit
to humble us, unite us, and make us new.

All: Come, Holy Spirit, Come.
Blow through our hearts and minds,
through the fears and foolishness
that separate us one from another,
and reshape us into the Body needed here and now.

One: Come, Holy Spirit, Come.
Fill us with new life, free of fear, ignorance, and stigma
that we may truly welcome, include, support, and engage all your children,
particularly those who struggle with symptoms of mental illness.

All: Come, Holy Spirit, Come. Make us W.I.S.E. Amen.

CALL TO OFFERING:

One: God seeks to bind us together,
to shape and reshape us into the church the world so desperately needs.
Jesus has shown us how to love one another, without fear, without judgment.

The Spirit empowers us to shatter stigma and embrace all God's people.
With hearts filled with gratitude and grace,
let us give as generously as we have been blessed.

PRAYER OF DEDICATION:

All: W.I.S.E. God, may the Spirit never stop churning
and turning our comfort into justice-seeking unrest.
We come before you, drawn by the power of your breath,
offering you our gifts and our very selves
that you may continue to build your Body,
one person at a time,
until all know the joy of being your Beloved. Amen.

BENEDICTION:

One: The One who created all that is
calls us by name and invites us into a life of abundant Love.

All: We go out into the world as God's beloved people,
bringing Holy Love to all whom we meet.

One: Jesus taught us to love one another as fiercely and freely
as God loves each of us,
with the power that binds us together as the Body of Christ.

All: We will embody Christ by shattering stigma and welcoming all,
leaving no one outside.

One: The Spirit fills us with the Breath of Life
and urges us to imagine anew how to be Church in the world today.

All: We will breathe deeply and move beyond what has been and what is.
We will follow the Spirit and bring hope and healing
to all who live in despair and brokenness. We will be the Church!

Prayers for Mental Health Sunday, May 20, 2018, were prepared by the UCC Mental Health Network, the Rev. Dr. Rachael Keefe, writer and pastor of Living Table United Church of Christ in Minneapolis, MN. Other prayers, pastoral resources and the W.I.S.E. GS resolution may be found at this link: <http://mhn-ucc.blogspot.com/p/mental-health-sunday.html>



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