

Sunday October 10, 2021

Scriptural Lesson: Psalm 22: 1-15

Sermon Series: Holy Spectrum- Yellow Part1

Preacher: Kirstie J. Engel

- **We are continuing in our sermon series entitled “Holy Spectrum”; a series designed to explore the Rainbow and the social issues, topics, spiritual growth opportunities and possibilities contained in it.**
- Today, my preaching goal is to examine our third color of the rainbow that is on our lawn with the words “All Are Welcome,” embedded in it.
- So with that said, the color that we are going to look at a little closer is the color **yellow**.
- My preaching goal this morning is to bring some awareness and conversation around a particular section of our society who have been

marginalized, unseen, oppressed and in many cases dismissed.

- In addition, my preaching goal is to tie in our lectionary scriptures this morning and invite us to consider what the Word may have to say to some of these conversations I am encouraging us to have and to explore pertaining to this section of our society.
- And so the way I would like to begin is by naming that October Is National Depression and Mental Health Screening Month, & ADHD Awareness Month, & So Much More!
- This observance works to bring awareness to the need for depression awareness and the need for accessible and affordable mental health screenings.
- Most importantly, why I feel led to speak on this topic for our color of yellow is because quite frankly, I feel called to address a major concern

that I have as a whole; as to how our overall society and churches have chosen to interface with this very important topic;

- And in a nutshell, I guess what I am naming is the most problematic from my point of view, is that **we haven't really chosen to interface** with this topic or at least very well;
- For as a society, those who have struggled with mental health have often been placed along the margins, primarily because of the many stigmas that have been associated with mental health disorders and conditions.
- **Stigmas that would** suggest that people in this category are unstable, crazy, deranged and even dangerous.
- **Stigmas that go way back** in the biblical days and possibly even before that;
- For although it is important to note that the Bible never explicitly speaks about mental illness in

terms of how we would define it in modern times;

- However if you were to examine the stories of a lot of the folks in the Bible just a little bit closer...perhaps before the end of this sermon we may begin to see biblical figures such as David (Psa. 38:4), Job (Job 3:26), Elijah (1 Kings 19:4), and Jonah (Jonah 4:3) in a new light and awareness...
- For in all of these people's stories, I stopped by to declare that they were all dealing with deep feelings of despair, anger, depression, and loneliness.
- So while some of these things can be attributed to spiritual warfare; Since we also know that our bodies are prone to go awry at times, it's possible that what they are experiencing is related to chemical imbalances or other things happening within our brains.

- So this is a long way of me then beginning to name the four phases of awareness that I feel like we must dive into this morning, so that we might begin to empower those who may identify with this color of yellow; to no longer feel alienated or marginalized by the stigmas associated with mental health concerns; but to be empowered to know and understand that you too are a vital, capable, valued member of our everyday societies and communities.
- So the four stages of awareness that I would like to take us through for our consideration, of how we might begin to empower this section of our society are to Educate, Accept, Normalize so that we may then Empower ourselves and others who may be struggling with mental health to know that we can be present, functional, successful and more.

- So looking at the first stage of awareness that I am inviting us to consider as it pertains to mental health is to begin educating ourselves on what is mental health and who might be included in this section of our society.
- So mental illness, also called mental health disorders; which refers to a wide range of mental health conditions — **disorders that affect your mood, thinking and behavior.** Examples of mental illness include depression, anxiety disorders, schizophrenia, eating disorders and addictive behaviors.
- So by this definition I thought about having a conversation with my mother in preparation for this sermon, because not only has she worked in the field of mental health for at least 20 years, my youngest brother works in children's mental health; my late grandmother worked in mental

health most of her life as well as my grandfather.

- So my self- disclosure is that part of my interest in this particular topic is because I come from it.
- Another part that I need to disclose is that the other interest in this particular topic is because by this definition of mental illness, I can now name without hesitation that I too am part of the society that I am naming.
- For roughly 15 years ago, sometime after having my children, my testimony is that I felt like one day my brain seemed to begin betraying me.
- I felt like my brain was broken.
- For I became incredibly anxious and triggered by just life as a whole.
- There were life stressors that made it very difficult to want to even face the day.

- I felt like I had literally lost my mind with this thought of this metaphorical shoe dropping at any moment;
- **A metaphorical shoe that informed me** that there would one day be a tragedy that I could not handle;
- **A metaphorical shoe that informed me** that food insecurity would annihilate me and my offspring;
- **A metaphorical shoe that informed me** that I was essentially a victimized mess if I can be honest;
- So my clinical diagnosis 15 years ago was PTSD and generalized anxiety.
- I spent a couple of years in therapy and counseling.
- Afterwards through my service in the ministry, spiritual practices, exercise, medication and just surrounding myself with healthy people who

loved me for who I am; I can declare that today although I will always have some of these mental health issues and triggers, I have learned how to manage them and thrive as a result.

- But here is the education part I need to name; that in speaking more with my mother about her experience with working in the mental health industry; she named that in our lives statistically speaking, we will all at some point go through a mental health issue when it is all said and done;
- For **if you can name** that you have ever been depressed for at least two weeks, then that qualifies as a mental health incident.
- **If you have ever** struggled with aspects of anxiety where it has interfered with any aspect of your life, then that qualifies as a mental health incident.

- **If you have ever had issues** with being able to control your emotions such as anger, frustrations, fear, grief and more, then that qualifies as a mental health incident.
- In fact, the bare act of living and breathing alone produces enough trauma and exertion on the body, that depending on your personal psychological makeup, **you and I could have a mental health incident;**
- **So this is a long way of my naming that we are all on the mental health spectrum, somewhere or somehow.**
- **All of us are on this mental health continuum.**
- So part of this education process that I am inviting us to consider and name, is that mental health does not always present itself in the forms of conditions such as bipolar or schizophrenia;

- On the contrary, mental health incidents and conditions are more common to our human condition as one might think or even consider;
- **The other aspect of education** that I would like to name is that just like as we all get older, other physical issues may arise such as arthritis, heart, lung, kidney issues and more;
- The brain is not exempt from this reality;
- For in our society, we tend to accept the physical ailments and conditions that we can physically see and feel and even normalize it in our minds;
- For **if we have** high blood pressure, we take our lisinopril...
- **If we have** glaucoma, we take our lumigan eye drops;
- **If we** sprain our ankle, we take our acetaminophen or our ibuprofen;

- But for some reason, there is still this sense of shame that we tend to carry in the admission that our mental health may require some level of intervention;
- Many of us shy away from naming that we have to take Wellbutrin or Zoloft or citalopram and so forth...
- A few of us of us may even have avoided the consideration of said medication at all because of the dreaded stigmas that are associated with mental health;
- **Which then leads me to the second stage of awareness that I feel lead to proclaim and name as our human reality, is the need for us to Accept that mental health should not be demonized or stigmatized;**
- We must accept that mental health is part of our human narrative and furthermore should be accepted;

- Because tying in our psalm more directly; David is generally accepted as being the author of this psalm;
- And as I mentioned earlier, I am convinced by the definition of mental health that I just shared; **disorders that affect your mood, thinking and behavior.** Examples of mental illness include depression, anxiety disorders, schizophrenia, eating disorders and addictive behaviors....
- **I am convinced that** we are witnessing a mental health incident unfold through David's psalm right before our very eyes...
- For David's opening two verses said; **1** My God, my God, why have you forsaken me? Why are you so far from helping me, from the words of my groaning?
- 2** O my God, I cry by day, but you do not answer; and by night, but find no rest.

- So David in our psalm is describing what looks to me as a depressive episode...
- Furthermore, where I am getting some preaching energy from and why I am insisting that we must **accept** that the need for mental health awareness is something that we all should advocate for, is because when we don't accept this fact; that mental illness is part of the human condition; the result is that the human spirit will feel forsaken.
- Furthermore, if the human condition stays in this forsaken place for too long;
- **This is when we begin** to see the suicide rate of our loved ones; especially our youth go up;
- **If the human spirit stays in this forsaken place** for too long, this is when harmful incidents begin to take its place and threaten our human existence;

- So this is why we must begin to accept that mental health awareness has to be part of our narrative;
- For **if we continue** to dismiss it;
- If **we continue to** stigmatize it;
- If **we continue to** evade it;
- If **we continue to** remain unaware of it;
- Then our children, our youth, our families, our societies will become consumed by the devastating effects of it.
- **Leading me then to lead us into the third stage of awareness that I believe is pertinent to this conversation as it pertains to mental health awareness;**
- And that is **it is time** for us as a community to then begin to normalize mental health incidents and illnesses in our every day language and communities that surround us.

- **It is time** for us remove the arm's length approach we tend to have towards those who struggle with mental health so that we can equip ourselves and thrive in this human condition.
- For there are too many people in our society being wrongfully killed and mistreated, because we don't educate ourselves enough about mental illness and the impact of untreated mental health concerns and issues on these forsaken sections of our society.
- For **I am thinking about people** such as Cecil Clayton who was executed on March 17, 2015, in Missouri.

He was 74, suffered from dementia, had an IQ of 71, was missing a significant part of his brain due to an accident. His attorneys insisted he should be spared because he did not understand the punishment to be carried out but the courts did not see it in the same way.

- **I am thinking of the most recent** execution where Missouri moved to execute intellectually disabled Ernest Johnson who murdered three people with a claw hammer.
- On October 1, Pope Francis, through Vatican diplomatic representative Archbishop Christophe Pierre, called on Parson to exercise mercy.
- Nevertheless Ernest Johnson was executed and although some may suggest that this is justice for three lives lost;
- I feel led to share that I am with the Pope on this one;
- For Ernest Johnson and others who suffer from severe mental illnesses that may even instruct them to do some of these heinous acts; from my perspective, lifelong imprisonment that provides mental observation, intervention and assistance still provides justice for the families impacted; but it also honors a collective understanding that there

are times where mental health disorders may lead to horrific acts; if we as a society chooses not to educate, accept and even normalize the fact that mental health awareness, education, intervention and assistance is something that is vital to the human condition and narrative if we wish to thrive.

- **Mental health education and awareness is vital so that we can then lead into our fourth stage of mental health awareness; to help empower those who have been forsaken, forgotten and rejected for a human condition that we did not ask for;**
- But with this new found awareness, we as a collective community can begin to provide education, resources and tools that can help answer the cries of those who are inflicted by these mental health challenges;
- **Because of this new found awareness,** we can begin to have helpful tools that may even begin to

intervene on some of these mental health incidents in our world, community and homes from manifesting itself the way it has been by way of suicide, self-affliction, self-addiction and even violence and murder.

- The bottom line, it is time to tear down the stigmas behind mental health disorders and incidents;
- For the reality is that more people have some measure of mental health symptoms without probably even realizing it;
- So the role of the church as I see it is to **educate** about mental health;
- To have messaging that invites us to **accept** mental health awareness as part of the human condition and narrative;
- The role of the Church is to even help **normalize mental health** so that the stigmas of mental health do not consume our communities;

- But on the contrary having these vital conversations will help to begin to promote mental health and enable all who struggle in our churches, communities and world not to feel forsaken;
- It will allow all who struggle with mental health incidents and illnesses to live out our yellow potential
- Where **through this yellow**, we begin to declare together, that there is sunshine behind the storm clouds of depression and anxiety;
- **That through this yellow**, we begin to understand that there is relief for those struggling with suicidal thoughts;
- **That through this yellow**, we are encouraged to know that there can be better days ahead, where we learn how to cope with our racing thoughts; feelings of doom and gloom and more;

- **Where we realize through this yellow**, that our minds are not broken; in fact on the contrary we will begin to realize how resilient we really are;
- For we are resilient because God our creator made us resilient;
- And so it is through God's resilience, the prayer is that we begin to let our yellow shine forth bold and beautiful;
- For now we understand that in the midst of it all, we do serve a God who will never leave nor forsake us;
- Oh gracious God of resilience, let this Church, let this community continue to hold this message in our hearts with a newfound level of understanding and awareness; to let our yellow light shine today and always;
- Amen and Hallelujah!



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**Sunday October 10, 2021**

**First Lesson: Psalm 22: 1-15**

**Gospel: Mark 10: 17-31**

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- **So this is a long way of my naming that we are all on the mental health spectrum, somewhere or somehow.**
- **All of us are on this mental health continuum.**
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forms of conditions such as bipolar or schizophrenia;

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- If we have high blood pressure, we take our lisinopril...
- If we have glaucoma, we take our lumigan eye drops;

- If we sprain our ankle, we take our acetaminophen or our ibuprofen;
- But for some reason, I have observed that there is still this sense of shame that we tend to carry in the admission that our mental health may be suffering;
- Many of us tend to shy away from naming that we have to take Wellbutrin or Zoloft or citalopram and so forth...
- A few of us I suspect, may even have even avoided the consideration of said medication at all because of the dreaded stigmas that are associated with mental health;

- **Which then leads me to the second stage of awareness that I feel lead to proclaim and name as our human reality is the need for us to Accept that mental health should not be demonized or stigmatized;**
- We must accept that mental health is part of our human narrative and furthermore should be accepted;
- Because tying in our psalm more directly; David is generally accepted as being the author of this psalm;
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**2** O my God, I cry by day, but you do not answer; and by night, but find no rest.
- So David in our psalm is describing what looks to me as a depressive incident...
- But where I am getting some preaching energy from and why I am insisting that we must **accept** that the need for mental health awareness is something that we all should advocate for is because when we don't accept this fact that mental illness is part of the human condition; the result is that the human spirit will feel forsaken.

- Furthermore, if the human condition stays in this forsaken place for too long;
- **This is when we begin** to see the suicide rate of our loved ones; especially our youth go up;
- **If the human spirit stays in this forsaken place** for too long, this is when harmful incidents begin to take its place that threatens our human survivability;
- So this is why we must begin to accept that mental health awareness has to be part of our narrative;
- For **if we continue to** dismiss it;
- **If we continue to** stigmatize it;
- **If we continue to** evade it;
- **If we continue to** remain unaware of it;
- Then our children, our youth, our families, our societies will become consumed by the devastating effects of it.

- **Leading me then to lead us into the third stage of awareness that I believe is pertinent to this conversation as it pertains to mental health awareness;**
- And that is **it is time for us** as a community to then begin to normalize mental health incidents and illness in our every day language and communities that surround us.
- **It is time for us to** remove the arm's length approach we tend to have towards those who struggle in mental health, so that we can equip ourselves and thrive in this human condition.
- For there are too many people in our society being wrongfully killed and mistreated, because we don't educate ourselves enough about mental illness and the impact of untreated mental health concerns and issues on these forsaken sections of our society.

- For **I am thinking about** people such as Cecil Clayton who was executed on March 17, 2015, in Missouri.

He was 74, suffered from dementia, had an IQ of 71, was missing a significant part of his brain due to an accident. His attorneys insisted he should be spared because he did not understand the punishment to be carried out but the courts did not see it in the same way.

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- **Mental health education and awareness is vital so that we can then lead into our fourth stage of mental health awareness; to help empower those who have been forsaken, forgotten and rejected for a human condition that we did not ask for;**
- But with this new found awareness, we as a collective community can begin to provide education, resources and tools that can help answer the cries of those who are afflicted by these mental health challenges;
- Because of this new found awareness, we can begin to have helpful tools that may even begin to intervene on some of these mental health incidents/crises in our world, community and homes from manifesting itself the way it has been by way of suicide, self-affliction, self-addiction and even violence and murder.

- So the bottom line for me is that **it is time** to tear down the stigmas behind mental health disorders and incidents;
- For the reality is that more people have some measure of mental health symptoms without probably even realizing it;
- So the role of the church as I see **it is to educate** about mental health;
- To have messaging that invites us **to accept** mental health awareness as part of the human condition and narrative;
- The role of the Church is to even **help normalize mental health** so that the stigmas of mental health do not consume our communities;
- But on the contrary having these vital conversations will help to begin to promote mental health and wellness and enable all who struggle in our churches, communities and world not to feel forsaken;

- It will allow all who struggle with mental health incidents and illnesses to live out our yellow potential;
- Where **through this yellow**, we begin to declare together that there is sunshine behind the storm clouds of depression and anxiety;
- **That through this yellow**, we now understand there is relief for those struggling with suicidal thoughts;
- **That through this yellow**, we are encouraged to know that there can be better days ahead, where we are empowered without the stigma of it to learn how to cope with our racing thoughts; feelings of doom and gloom and more;
- **That through this yellow** in peaking at our gospel;
- A gospel that reveals an individual who wants to experience the kingdom of God and was told he would need to leave his riches behind;

- We may also consider that there is another section of our society who yearns and deserves to experience the **same kingdom of God...**
- Making our role as a Church, to be the voice that allows the yellow of those plagued by mental health illness and the stigmas associated with it to shine forth;
- The prayer church family is **that through this yellow**, we begin to share a reconciling story and testimony that proclaims that those affected with mental health issues; that our minds are not broken, in fact on the contrary we will begin to realize how resilient we really are;
- We are resilient because God created us to be resilient;
- And through God's resilience, the prayer is that we begin to let our yellow shine forth bold and beautiful;

- For now we understand that in the midst of it all, we do serve a God who will never leave nor forsake us;
- Oh gracious God of resilience, let this Church, let this community continue to hold this message in our hearts with a newfound level of understanding and awareness; to let our yellow light shine today and always;
- Amen and Hallelujah!