

June 13th, 2021

Immanuel United Church

Radical Belonging: Mental Health Prayers and Reflections for All

Welcome

As our communities slowly emerge from the collective trauma of COVID-19, we or someone we know has been touched by symptoms of depression and anxiety during the pandemic. The loss of lives, physical contact with beloved people, and life milestones weigh heavy on our lives and our communities.

This Sunday, we will worship in the theme of Radical Belonging: Mental Health Prayers and Reflections for All, inspired by the resources that are created by the United Church of Christ Mental Health Network and The United Church of Canada. We are called to be inclusive places where God's Kin_dom manifests through relationships of mutual respect for all people, including those living with mental health challenges, substance use disorders, neurodevelopmental differences, brain disorders, and their families. Such sacred places offer welcome into all aspects of our shared life, leadership, and work as faith communities, recognizing that God blesses everyone with spiritual gifts and graces to share.

Mental illness and disability are part of the natural diversity of creation, neither a flaw nor a blessing, but one of the diverse ways of being an embodied creature. The image of God is not as a set of capabilities that can be listed and measured according to standards of exchange value, such that their absence makes someone less human; rather, it is a sign of intrinsic goodness and preciousness that is vulnerable and expressed differently in each person.

We need not be "perfect," but radical belonging requires more than good intentions; more than offering access to our sanctuaries and greetings to newcomers. Radical belonging calls us to provide welcome, inclusion, support, and engagement with every individual and family. It calls us to look into our own and our communities' conscious and unconscious stigma around difference. This includes acknowledging and dismantling the systemic sins of racism, ableism, sexism, homophobia, transphobia, and the oppression of indigenous peoples that emerged from the structures of colonialism and white supremacy. Radical belonging demands living out a theology of human wholeness that is more expansive and inclusive than the narrow European cultural perspectives that declared 'others' as deviant.

Call to Worship:

God invites us to co-create communities of radical belonging for all.

We are creating communities of radical belonging for people living with mental health challenges, conditions, and illness and their loved ones.

Jesus shows us how to love our neighbors as ourselves.

We are loving our neighbors who experience mental health conditions, challenges, and illness and their loved ones. We are loving ourselves no matter where we are on the spectrum of mental wellness today.

The Spirit empowers us to create communities of radical belonging for people with brain diseases and disorders, and people living with substance use and addictions and their loved ones.

We are co-creating with God communities of radical belonging and love for everyone. May our worship inspire and empower us for the journey.

Prayer:

God of love, stir in us deep compassion for people living with brain disorders and their families. Raise our awareness of how we can create a supportive and safe spiritual community for people who feel isolated, shunned and ashamed. Inspire us to reach out in love as a sign of your radical hospitality and grace. Encourage us to receive the gifts that are given by all, including those who are living with mental health challenges.

Mental Health Beatitudes # 1:

People who need to take a sick day for mental health are **loved by God.**

People on the Psych Ward are **loved by God.**

People with night terrors are **loved by God.**

People with executive dysfunction are **loved by God.**

People who have panic attacks are **loved by God.**

People with delusions are **loved by God.**

People with Opioid Use Disorder are **loved by God.**

People with Anorexia are **loved by God.**

People with alcoholism are **loved by God.**

People with excessive worry are **loved by God.**

Silent Reflection

Hymn: MV 85 *Take, O Take Me As I Am* (Taize chant)

<https://youtu.be/0ZoG19OdmEY>

*Take, O take me as I am; summon out what I shall be;
Set your seal upon my heart and live in me.*

Intergenerational Time: **When God Cries** (Rev. Dr. Sarah Lund)

(Please watch Desmond Tutu's God's Dream: <https://youtu.be/KSzB5wxuPFk>)

Desmond Tutu's beloved children's book *God's Dream* describes a young boy who cries when he realizes that his selfish actions have caused a rift in a friendship with a classmate. Tutu writes that God cries, too, when we hurt others and are ourselves hurt. I'm taken by this sentiment of God crying with us; and the message that God is not too holy to feel. God is not above emotion, but God is below. We find God alongside us in the depths of our suffering; God cries, too. In my children's sermon about mental health, I show the children a small, unopened package of tissues. I ask a volunteer to open the package and share with us what they discover inside. Carefully a tissue emerges from its package. Then I ask for a tissue from the child. I share that I need it to wipe my eyes because I had been a little teary that morning.

We talk about how when we have big feelings that don't have words, they come out as tears. I share Tutu's book, showing them the page where the boy is crying. I read to them about how when we are crying, God cries, too.

We talk about how tissues are also used when we are sick and have a runny nose, a bad cold or a sinus infection. Sometimes when we are very sick, we go to the doctor and get medicine.

Our brains, just like our hearts and our lungs, need to be healthy. But sometimes when we are not feeling good, we go see a doctor. I share that my brother went to the doctor because his brain was not feeling good. The doctor gave him medicine to help him feel better.

Now my brother is home from the hospital and his brain is doing better. Mental health means taking care of our whole body; including our brain. When our brain is healthy, we feel better.

Sometimes we cry when we are feeling sad. And when we cry, God is with us. When we are sick and not feeling good, God is with us. We are never alone because God is always with us. God loves us even when we cry and when we feel sick, even when we are happy and feel healthy.

Let us pray: Thank you God for tears that express how we are feeling. Thank you, God, for our brains that help us know your love. Thank you, God, for mental health and for people who help us feel better when we are sick. We love you. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

Scripture: Lamentations 5:19-22

Introduction:

Mental illness remains one of the most stigmatized disorders in North American society. Stigma refers to those negative attitudes and beliefs that arouse fear, rejection, avoidance, and discrimination against individuals with mental illness. Consequently, individuals with mental illness may internalize those negative attitudes and beliefs, so much so that they may conceal symptoms and fail to seek treatment. Stigmatization also contributes to an approach to Christian faith that is at dis-ease with expressions of psychological distress (e.g., depression or anxiety), and thus may lead Christian congregations to treat individuals with mental illness as outcasts.

The primary literary form utilized in the book of Lamentations is the lament, which is a prayer of protest, complaint, and grief that fervently appeals, either individually or communally, for divine deliverance. Its purpose “is to address God in the midst of inexplicable suffering.” At its essence, a lament is a “cry for help.” As such, it is familiar – in content, if not in form – to all of us, for who among us has not cried out – in anger, grief, frustration, or torment – at some point in our lives? Individuals with mental illness know lament all too well.

The “themes of the alienation of God’s people” in verses 19 – 22 can be seen as analogous to the stigma of mental illness, and thus gives voice to the lament of those with mental illness, substance use disorders, or other brain differences.

**But you, O Lord, reign for ever;
your throne endures to all generations.
Why have you forgotten us completely?
Why have you forsaken us these many days?
Restore us to yourself, O Lord, that we may be restored;
renew our days as of old—
unless you have utterly rejected us,
and are angry with us beyond measure.**

The Choir Anthem: *Balm in Gilead*

(The singers are Rob and Marg Smith and Jim and Joy Jost. Rob sings the solo parts.)

Mental Health Beatitudes # 2:

People with social anxiety are **loved by God.**

People at risk for suicide are **loved by God**.
People with Insomnia are **loved by God**.
People with Dissociative Disorders are **loved by God**.
People with Psychosis are **loved by God**.
People with Borderline Personality are **loved by God**.
People with Obsessive-Compulsive Disorder are **loved by God**.
People with oppositional defiant disorder (ODD) are **loved by God**.
People with Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) are **loved by God**.

Message: *The God Whose Eyes Are Full of Tears*

Understanding the radical interconnectivity of all living beings invites us to our own part to embrace suffering empathetically. It generates the new image of the divine, sacred or God who empathizes with the sufferers. In a play that features the interview with the military prostitutes who were forced to be quarantined until they were cured from sexual diseases by the government which unjustly supported and protected the industry of sexual workers around the military base of US Army in Korea, at the deathbed, an old town prostitute says,

“When you pray, my tears flow into your eyes, and yours into God’s eyes. God is the one whose eyes are full of tears. A God whose eyes are full of tears is our lover, intimate partner and healed healer.”

Hymn: VU 619 *Healer of Our Every Ill*

(Refrain) **Healer of our every ill, light of each tomorrow,
give us peace beyond our fear, and hope beyond our sorrow.**

**You who know our fears and sadness, grace us with your peace and gladness.
Spirit of all comfort, fill our hearts. (Refrain)**

In the pain and joy beholding, how your grace is still unfolding.

Give us all your vision, God of love. (Refrain)

Give us strength to love each other, every sister, every brother.

Spirit of all kindness, be our guide. (Refrain)

You who know each thought and feeling, teach us all your way of healing.

Spirit of compassion, fill each heart. (Refrain)

Mental Health Beatitudes # 3:

People who self-harm are **loved by God**.

People with schizophrenia are **loved by God**.

People with eating disorders are **loved by God**.

People with Bipolar are **loved by God.**
People with addiction are **loved by God.**
People with anxiety are **loved by God.**
People with depression are **loved by God.**
People with post-traumatic stress disorder are **loved by God.**

Mental illness is a mental health condition, not a curse from God.
Mental illness is not a character flaw.
Faith helps us seek after God's presence in the midst of mental illness.

The leading cause of mass shootings: GUNS (not mental illness)
Less than 5 % of gun-related homicides in the US from 2001-10 were by people with diagnosed mental illness.

To be human is to experience the full spectrum of mental health.
God is with us, even in the worst parts of life.

Breaking the silence in a safe place is the first step toward hope.
We all have important stories to tell. It's sacred and healing work to listen.
God loves people living with mental illness.

Silent Reflection

Hymn: VU 600 *When I Needed a Neighbour* (verses 1, 3, 4, 5)

V. 1 **When I needed a neighbour, were you there, were you there?** (X 2)

V. 2 **When I was cold, I was naked, were you there, were you there?** (X 2)

V. 4 **When I needed a healer, were you there, were you there?** (X 2)

(Refrain) **And the creed and the colour and the name won't matter, were you there?**

Wherever you travel I'll be there, I'll be there (X2)

And the creed and the colour and the name won't matter, I'll be there.

Communion:

May God be with us.

God is here among us.

Let us open our hearts to God.

We open them to God and to one another.

Let us give thanks to God.

It is right to give our thanks and praise.

  Child: Why do we give thanks and praise at this table?  
Responsive Reader: **We give thanks because God is always with us.**

We thank you, God, Creator of us all;
from the beginning you made the world and all its creatures.
You made people to live for you and for one another.
We praise you, O God.
We praise you, O God.

You created Adam and Eve **and gave them a garden;**
you showed Noah **a rainbow;**
you gave Moses strength to free your people
and taught Miriam to sing;
you gave courage to Esther
and friendship to Ruth;
you gave David a harp to sing your praise,
and helped him defeat the giant.
We praise you, O God.
We praise you, O God.

You sent Jesus to the world
to show how much you love us
and to bring us back to you again.
We praise you, O God.
We praise you, O God.

He came as one of us,
first an infant, then a child,
later a youth, then an adult.
He rejoiced with those who rejoiced,
and wept with those who wept.
To the despairing, **he spoke a word of hope.**
To the sick, **he gave healing.**
To the hurting, **he was a friend.**

Therefore with all the saints of every time and place,
we join the angels in their praise:
Holy, holy, holy God,
power of life and love!

**Heaven and earth are full of your glory!
Hosanna through the ages!
Blest is the One who comes to bring your justice to earth!**

  Child: Why do we eat bread at this table?  

We gather at this table to remember that
on the night before he died, Jesus ate with his friends,
he took a loaf of bread, and after blessing it,
he broke it and gave it to them, saying:
**“Take, eat. This is my body, given for you.
Each time you do this, remember me.”**

  Child: Why do we drink from the cup at this table?  

That same night, Jesus also took a cup, and after giving thanks,
passed it to his friends, saying:
**“Drink. This cup, poured out for you,
is the promise of God.
Whenever you drink it, remember me.”**

  Child: What do we remember at this table?  

We remember Jesus’ death and celebrate his resurrection;
we await with hope his coming again
to bring peace and justice to the earth;
and we proclaim the mystery of our faith:

**Christ has died.
Christ is risen.
Christ will come again.**

  Child: For whom do we pray at this table?  

We pray for God’s world

For four beautiful people who were killed by islamophobic hate in London,
Ontario, this week.

We must insist. Each and every life is sacred. Each and every person bears the image of the Divine. Each and every person has a right to safety, security, and a place to thrive.

We pray for the child who survived, may there be healing.
For those whose fear is heightened, may there be solidarity.

We pray for an end to the stigma of mental illness.
We pray for families torn apart by mental health diseases, and for families that hold on to one another during difficult times of illness.

We pray for those who have lost a loved one to suicide.

We pray for children, teens, and young adults learning how to live with newly diagnosed brain diseases.

We pray for people burdened by labels and stereotypes.
We pray for people who are victims of bullying and discrimination because of their disability.

We give thanks for the many gifts that people with mental health disease bring into the world and celebrate the creative genius of artists, scientists, authors, scholars, business leaders, actors, musicians, inventors, and presidents who live with mental illness.

Still speaking God, as the mysteries of the human brain unfold, we remain in awe of the intricate ways in which we are created in your image.
May we be reflections of your love in this world.

A special thank you and prayers for all Immanuel folks who have printed worship packages and Sunday School packages and delivered them to house to house to house over the last Covid-19 months:

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and others...

Send, O God, your Holy Spirit upon us and what we do here,
that we and these gifts, touched by your Spirit,
may be signs of life and love to one another,
and to the world.

Distribution

Prayer After Communion:

**We give thanks that bread broken brings wholeness;
that wine poured out replenishes;
that time spent with the Living One and one another
is gift and grace.
Amen.**

Hymn: VU 716 *My Life Flows On*
<https://youtu.be/-RHt3EIEvHQ>

*My life flows on in endless song, above earth's lamentation.
I hear the sweet, though far off hymn that hails a new creation.
Through all the tumult and the strife, I hear the music ringing:
It finds an echo in my soul — how can I keep from singing?*

*What though my joys and comforts die? My saviour still is living.
What though the shadows gather 'round? A new song Christ is giving.
No storm can shake my inmost calm, while to that Rock I'm clinging:
Since Love commands both heaven and earth, how can I keep from singing?*

*When tyrants tremble, sick with fear, and hear their death knells ringing:
When friends rejoice both far and near, how can I keep from singing?
In prison cell and dungeon vile our thoughts to them are winging:
When friends by shame are undefiled, how can I keep from singing?*