

Immanuel United Church
August 22nd, 2021

Welcome

Call to Worship:

Jesus said, "Foxes have holes, and birds of the air have nests;
but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay his head" (Luke 9:58) .

Jesus also said, "Follow me" (Luke 9: 59).

So here it is, my friends:

we who have places to lay our heads,
we who have more attachments
and entanglements than we can ever count,
we who may not travel light through this world
are called to follow this homeless wanderer.

**We are trying; we are learning;
we are stumbling; we are falling;
we are rising again.**

Prayer:

**It is astonishing, God, to think that,
in the vastness of the universe,
you not only notice us but love us
and long for us to be whole and happy.
It is even more astonishing to hear that
you love and care for those
who are different from us,
for those we don't like,
even for those we call "enemies."
Most astonishing of all,
you seem to see us as essential
to your great work of healing
and reconciliation.
Send your Spirit among us;
teach us your will and your ways.
We pray in the name of the rabbi Jesus. Amen.**

Hymn: VU 356 *Seek Ye First the Kingdom*

Scripture: John 6:56-69

Those who eat my flesh and drink my blood abide in me, and I in them.

Just as the living Father sent me, and I live because of the Father, so whoever eats me will live because of me.

This is the bread that came down from heaven, not like that which your ancestors ate, and they died. But the one who eats this bread will live forever."

He said these things while he was teaching in the synagogue at Capernaum.

When many of his disciples heard it, they said, "This teaching is difficult; who can accept it?"

But Jesus, being aware that his disciples were complaining about it, said to them, "Does this offend you?"

Then what if you were to see the Son of Man ascending to where he was before?

It is the spirit that gives life; the flesh is useless. The words that I have spoken to you are spirit and life.

But among you there are some who do not believe." For Jesus knew from the first who were the ones that did not believe, and who was the one that would betray him.

And he said, "For this reason I have told you that no one can come to me unless it is granted by the Father."

Because of this many of his disciples turned back and no longer went about with him.

So Jesus asked the twelve, "Do you also wish to go away?"

Simon Peter answered him, "Lord, to whom can we go? You have the words of eternal life.

We have come to believe and know that you are the Holy One of God."

Reflection: Did Jesus ever talk about depression?

Did Jesus ever talk about depression? Probably not.

We live in this post-Freudian 21st century in which the media often talks about psychology as science. There are antidepressants available at the pharmacy once you have consulted with your doctors. Generally, depression is understood to be a clinical, mental ailment, something to treat, manage or defeat. Some conditions are more serious and are deeply related to a childhood trauma(s) or life's adversaries and need a professional's support. Today, I would like to invite us to approach the subject of depression from a more theological or spiritual perspective: Did Jesus ever talk about depression?

Probably not because — the real point I would like to make is — obviously Jesus and his contemporaries did not have the word depression in their vocabulary, living in first century Palestine. However, I am sure that Jesus knew what depression was and how it was manifested in the lives of the people, and perhaps in his own, too. Jesus was fully human as we are, equally as he is fully divine, which is the power of the Christian theology of Incarnation.

First, let's talk about what the Bible has said about depression. Though the Bible doesn't use the word "depression" except in a few translations and verses, it's often referred to by other similar words, such as "downcast", "broken hearted," "troubled," "miserable," "despairing," and "mourning", among others. (<https://www.crosswalk.com/faith/spiritual-life/7-bible-figures-who-struggled-with-depression.html>) For example, in many of the Psalms, David writes of his anguish, loneliness, fear of the enemy, the guilt he struggled with: "My guilt has overwhelmed me like a burden too heavy to bear." (Ps. 38:4) "Why are you downcast, O my soul? Why so disturbed within me? Put your hope in God for I will yet praise the Lord, my Saviour and my God" (Ps. 42:11). After great victories over the prophets of Baal, Elijah feared and ran for his life, far away from the threat of revenge. And there in the desert defeated and worn, he sat down and prayed: "I have had enough Lord. Take my life, I am not better than my ancestors." (1 King 19:4) Jonah was still angry even when he could have rejoiced that all the people in Nineveh turned to God.. "Now O Lord, take away my life, for it is better for me to die than to live." (Jonah 4:3) And even after God reached out to Jonah again with great compassion, he responded, "... I am angry enough to die." (Jonah 4:9) Job suffered through great loss, devastation, and physical illness. So great was his suffering and tragedy that even his own partner said, "Are you still holding on to your integrity? Curse God and die!" (Job 2:9) And the greatest hero/prophet of all time, Moses, was not without depression throughout his life - - in his youth, he ran out to the desert and hid in the care of his Midianite father-in-law, and until he died, he grieved over the sin of his people. Prophets wrestled with great loneliness, feelings of defeat, and insecurity. It's hard to say Jesus was without them in his life and ministry. He knew that God had called him to a journey of great suffering. Isaiah prophesied that Christ would be "a person of sorrows, and acquainted with grief." (Isaiah 53:3) In the garden, through the night, Jesus prayed, all alone, and he said to his close disciples, "My soul is deeply grieved to the point of death; remain here and keep watch."

These verses and stories clearly demonstrate the anguish-laden hearts of the prophets and Jesus in pain-filled situations of depression and agony, which suggests that Jesus could know when someone else was depressed. Jesus could know when we are in depression.

Now, I would like to go a little deeper to touch on the subject of depression more theologically, spiritually. I had a very valuable lesson during the pandemic last winter. One morning, when I was calm enough to be able to be more fully present with myself, a subtle awareness visited me and opened new understanding: I am in depression. It *is* depression. That day, I started with cheerfulness. I loved the cold air let in through the windows for 15 minutes for ventilation. I loved to see the gas fire in the fireplace of my new home. With coffee latte in my 14 oz Le

Cruiset mug, it was a lovely morning. But I noticed that there was also a subtle presence of depression in the quiet corner of my spirit — not harmful, but truthful. It was the middle of the pandemic. I am usually a goal-oriented person, questing and following my curiosity to do something, start something. Accomplish something. Productivity, preparation for future goals and launching on to next steps to secure success are important. However, I had nothing to do that morning. So no progress was possible. Everything which I planned and hoped for, stopped and was not moving like a traffic bottleneck. We live in not only the post-Freudian, post-modern world, that has the vocabulary of depression in everyone's mind to make sense of where we are and what we are doing (or not doing), but also, it is the same era when progress, success, achievement, celebrity rule our aspirations. If these are not in our hands and are unforeseeable in our future — in other words, when we lose the sense of these "Gods", we spiral down to/touch the bottom of our being: depression.

Depression vs progress! I have learned that in the same sense that our attachment to progress does not always have a bright side, depression does not always have a dark corner. Perhaps depression is a profound condition of being human, how we are human, how we learn to be ourselves. Depression is not like a trap, as "something else" that shouldn't be part of us, part of our lives. But depression may be more like what we need to see, learn, acknowledge or even embrace in faith and with courage, integrity and honesty — as a "profound human condition". We cannot always be in a progressive state. Our emotions are more truthful than our convictions and beliefs. And thus, depression can be a closer path to reach the truth and the ground of our being. Noticing, realizing, learning, embracing depression takes maturity.

The following may also be true: Most of us who grew up in a culture which praises progress, regardless of whether we succeed or project confidence outwardly, we live daily by not truly feeling, or denying, refusing, fighting, and/or ignoring depression. Do you nod your head? If so, for the sake of our spiritual health, we should ask what causes profound depression. Why are we denying or refusing to more meaningfully acknowledge/engage with our depression? And if we get to know depression, as a teacher rather than a feared enemy, what will change in the world?

I have faith that Jesus knew our human condition. He knew what profound spiritual condition his people struggled with, wrestled with; What they ignored, embraced or refused to engage with in the particular time and society of his; What defined/determined the depression of his time and in his people in an occupied land under Roman military and Jewish religious authorities, under the hierarchy against women and children; bruised by the condemnation and exclusion of the mentally and physically disabled people. If not, Jesus wouldn't describe himself as Living Bread. He said "I am the living bread that came down from heaven. This is the bread that came down from heaven, not like that which your ancestors ate, and they died. But the one who eats this bread will live forever." He also says, "This bread is my flesh, which I will give for the life of the world." Upon these, Peter confesses, "I am not going away. We are not leaving you. Lord, to whom can we go? You have the words of eternal life."

So, did Jesus ever talk about depression? Depression is a contemporary concept to describe certain levels and status of one aspect of the human condition in the post 20th century. Our vocabulary is abundant with scientific terms. Certainly, Jesus did not have it. He did not say it. Also, Jesus did not treat it as something to fear, condemn, or cast away. He invited his community to an opportunity to be aware of it, acknowledge it, learn about it and embrace it as a profound human condition with which they needed to be honest, to respond to faithfully and to integrate. Then, he invited us also to aspire to change. This change is not conforming to the norms and success of the society of the 1st century, neither of our time, the 21st. The change Jesus is inviting God's people towards is about "the spirit that gives life." (V.) Jesus knew we all have the capacity, the gift from God, to be able to learn and change with the Living Bread, and asking what it is, what the Living Bread is and means to us, and how it becomes reality is now laid before us, the earth-community in the 21st century, to explore and create together, with open heart, courage, and a new aspiration for the spirit that gives life. Amen.

Hymn: VU 222 ***Come, Let Us Sing***

Prayers of the People:

God of global warming water and acid rains,
But also the Holy One of the water of cool, refreshing streams and oceans,
As we share our prayers this morning, we unite ourselves with you,
with your struggles, your hopes, your dreams, and your pains.
Your health is ours.
Your beauty is ours.
Your wisdom is ours.
Your wholeness is ours.
We pray these statements become true in our lives.

We pray that as your children,
We grow like sunflowers, true heliotropic flowers,
Looking for the Sun, following the Sun, chasing the ultimate source of where the light comes
from,
8 light minutes away.

(When sunflowers cannot find the sun, they turn toward each other.)

Prayers for Afghanistan

<https://www.crosswalk.com/faith/prayer/prayers-to-lift-up-for-afghanistan.html>

Look into our hearts, O God,
Knowing us from the inside out:
The failings and the faltering;
The faithful following and the joyous passion;

The worries and the wondering;
The strengths and the visionary loving;
The feeble stumbles and the weary steps;
The yearning for unity with the One who is closer than our own breath,
Who is spirit and life;
Love, kindness, acceptance, understanding;
Forgiveness. Confidence. Assurance.

May you touch us with healing hands,
bringing us to a place of health and wholeness,
infusing us with hope and with courage,
embracing us within your heart,
You, the Sun of our prayers, 8 light minutes away.

Amen.

Hymn: MV 212 *Sent Out in Jesus' Name*

Commissioning and Benediction:

**While we have taken a few moments
to still the “wind and the waves” in our own lives
by gathering together for worship,
we are now asked to go out into the world
to help calm the “wind and the waves”
in the lives of others whom we meet or hear about through the Worldwide Web,
in the coming week.**