

Christ on the Psych Ward

Week 2: A Deep and Terrifying Darkness

- Despite some coherent thoughts shared in Chapter 1, David (re)iterates that most of his struggle with mental illness has been moments of confusion and disorientation.
- To understand God's presence, one has to first grapple with the absence of God. (30)
- The idea of God's absence seems unthinkable, but it is Biblical through the Psalms of lament.
- Psalms are prayers, not theology papers; they arise out of experience, not intellectual thought.
- Some who struggle with mental health worry about theology grounded in feeling and experience, since "feelings aren't facts." David, though, thinks that since both people's experience and descriptions of God's salvation are intertwined in Scripture, they are linked in life as well. (33-35)
- Those who lived the events of Holy Week did not know that resurrection was coming. The cry of Jesus from the cross "my God, why have you forsaken me?" seems unanswered. For some, this suggests Jesus taking on the world's sins in order to atone for them; David sees it more as identifying with those whose cries of suffering are cries of protest against the feeling of God's absence. (35-38)
- Doubt in God's presence, especially as David identifies in the midst of mental illness, goes beyond intellectual doubt. It is a traumatic doubt that can disjoint and disorient us.
- We want a loud, certain experience of God in the fact of this kind of doubt, but we often find God in the quiet presence of others. (38-39)
- Genesis 15, Abram's covenant with God, describes moments of God's showing up in vulnerable ways (as the covenant ceremony of the time required), and being present in the midst of Abram's doubt and uncertainty. (41-42)
- We do not like living in this disoriented space - we want to move quickly to happier places. But if we are to be in ministry to those who are suffering, including those suffering with mental health, then we need to get more comfortable living in that space.