

Christ on the Psych Ward

Week 6: God's Friends

- David tells us of an exercise he and others did on the psych ward where they were asked to write down 5 "supports" in their life - "people or things they could rely on in times of need." Some, like David, could name 5, although they still often felt isolated and lonely. Others could not name a single person. (93)
- Scripture witnesses to the misery of loneliness, and God's desire to be in solidarity for and with those who feel alone. (94-95)
- The Gospel of John in particular witnesses to the gifts of friendship and presence. (95-96)
- For those experiencing mental illness, isolation and loneliness can take many forms. In these cases, "the role of the Christian community lies not only in creating a context that will nurture relational development...but also in actively countering the wider interpersonal and social forces that act to stigmatize, alienate, oppress, and exclude many people with mental health problems from full social inclusion." (96-97)
- Caregiving isn't just for professionals and family members - although both are important. David envisions what caregiving looks like in a "community of care" inspired by the community that he found on the psych ward. (98-101)
- John 14 tells of a *parakletos* who Jesus will ask the Father to send. This *parakletos* is often translated as 'advocate,' or 'comforter'; the more literal translation is "one called alongside." This alongside-one is associated with breath and brings profound peace. (101-102)
- "The image of the *parakletos*, then, the one who is called alongside, is both an image of the divine and, at the same time, an image for the church in ministry to the world... We are only a Christian community when the air that we breathe is the Spirit who advocates for those who feel silenced, accompanies those who are afraid, and comforts those who are afflicted." (103)
- Sometimes this Spirit calls us, like Jesus and his disciples, to provide comfort; other times, to advocate; and still other times, to simply accompany. (103-104)
- Those on psych ward have learned to do this for each other - not from professional training, but out of necessity to live and have hope. The church could learn much from this model of community and caring. (105-106)