

January 26, 2020, 3<sup>rd</sup> Sunday after Epiphany  
Rev. Jen Nagel, University Lutheran Church of Hope  
Isha Caldwell, Mental Health Connect

Isaiah 9:1-4, Psalm 27:1, 4-9  
1 Corinthians 1:1-18, Matthew 4:12-23

**Grace and peace, beloved of Christ Jesus. Amen.**

**In the middle of this week I had an early video conference call with a group of colleagues.**

We were interviewing a professor at Union Seminary in New York City about worship.

As people joined the call, many with coffee at their side, most from home,

a few of us breathless after getting kids out the door,

we greeted one another and chatted.

Someone asked how I am doing and I said, fine; that's what we say, right?

Then I commented that it feels like a heavy week.

Heavy politically, these are heavy times.

And heavy as there are many in our congregation struggling with grief or illness,

with mental health ... it just feels heavy.

**As the official conversation began**, the interviewee, the one from New York, Janet Walton, spoke of what she's learning from the work of writer Toni Morrison.

Toni Morrison shares a concern that we don't see one another enough.

In terms of inclusive worship and ritual, Professor Walton wanted us to think about space.

Even in worship, how are we seeing one another?

She shared some great stories about clandestine movements to unscrew the pews:

how much uproar this caused,

how profoundly it has changed some community's experience of worship and experience of God.

**Today I'm not focused on pews, but I share that concern that we need to look at one another.**

Take a moment, look at one another.

See each other ... and the stuff we're carrying,

Some of it is heavy, some of it joyful, some of it mundane.

Look around, with eyes of empathy: really see each other.

As the video conference continued, Professor Walton said (I think with my early comments in mind):

**“The first thing we need to do in a community is find out who is suffering.”**

Let me be clear, this isn't in an effort to get into “someone's business.”

Seeing one another, listening well, growing our cultural competence ... this is risky.

Being seen, being vulnerable, even showing up when we're feeling tender or raw ... this is risky, too.

The point, then, is to recognize our vulnerability in the struggle.

### **Today's gospel is busy, it's full:**

Jesus' co-conspirator, John the Baptist, has been arrested, the politics are high, complex.

Jesus is on the move from one land to another, one community to another,

there is grief and transition, new possibilities.

For those brothers, the first disciples, and for their dad Zebedee, there is the interweaving of calling, what we to do in this life, and the ties of family and economics, culture and identity.

Finally there is this catch-all line that is deep, much deeper than we sometimes realize:

*“Jesus went throughout Galilee, teaching in their synagogues and proclaiming the good news of the kingdom and curing every disease and every sickness among the people.”*

Jesus is crossing lines of religion and culture,

seeing the struggle, the vulnerability and

attending to our physical health as well as our mental health, and our spiritual health

### **The first thing we must do in a community is find out who is suffering.**

We must see one another, knowing that we each carry a heavy load, that we're often not “fine.”

The stigma, the fear, they can be immense, and yet we're called to live in the tension, the complexity of these amazingly resilient and yet fallible bodies and minds.

In that space, Jesus shows up.

In that space, there is grace.

**I'm grateful for the work of Mental Health Connect.**

Mental Health Connect is an interfaith collaboration of 13 congregations in 15 sites, helping people and their families get connected to mental health services.

Last spring, with the encouragement of Marilyn Asp, our congregation became part of this collaboration. Sarah Wille and Sarah Tufvesson Doure take the lead, sharing information, keeping mental health before us, for instance having a table at the Farmers Market to share resources. Sara and Sarah are here this morning with resources at the table.

### **Isha Caldwell is a Mental Health Navigator with Mental Health Connect.**

Isha's role is to help people navigate the mental health system...

sometimes that means for themselves,

sometimes that means navigating with or for a family member or friend.

I'm grateful, Isha, that you are able to be here today.

Thank you.

Hello, my name is Isha Caldwell. I am a Mental Health Navigator with Mental Health Connect. I want to first thank you for your grace in allowing me to postpone my first schedule meeting here when I was feeling under the weather. I am so excited, happy, and honored to be able to stand here and talk about mental health and wellness with you all today.

Mental Health in our society is still very misunderstood by a large portion of the population. Some people do not want to claim that they have a mental health disorder or express that they may be someone who is impacted by a loved one's mental health concerns. But it is important to come together and be open about these topics, like we are doing today, in an effort to reduce stigma and lift up mental wellness for us all. I am aware that this community has a foundation in mental health awareness and I want to commend that.

I want to lift up today mental wellness and self-defined selfcare. The word selfcare, in my field, has become a buzz word. Yoga, exercise, healthy eating, and massages are some of the words that come up on google when this word is searched. However, selfcare is what you make it. Setting healthy boundaries for one's self counts. Eating and sleeping regularly counts. Laying in the snow and making snow angels counts. Volunteering for a cause you support counts. Any and every activity that offers your brain, soul and body rest or energy can be selfcare. Encouraging others to maintain their selfcare is important as well.

Let me share a story with you of a time when I did not provide the best care for myself. In April 2015 I had, what I thought, was food poisoning. I was vomiting violently, **(I know you all want to hear more details about that!)** I had severe abdominal pain, it felt worse than when I was in labor with my son. The thought of going to the hospital crossed my mind and move away quickly. Thanks to my mother, for being insistent on me to the hospital despite my desperate pleas not to go. After arriving we found out that I had appendicitis. If I had not gone to the hospital, my appendix, could have burst and I could have died. I did not understand the importance of providing myself with basic health care which is a part of self-care as well. Thankfully I had the encouragement of family to open my eyes to this.

What job or responsibility do we have to those who may be living with and managing their mental health symptoms in order to complete tasks or just simply live?

I hope as I posed this question you were able to visualize someone in your mind who could use this type of encouragement. I hope also that you thought of some ways you could support someone else that would feel natural. The ways in which I choose to help are direct and indirect. I work to break down stigma, educate and use my privilege to advocate for others. These are indirect ways. I also choose to listen. This is my direct way of supporting. Listening is hard. Hearing the pain, struggle, challenge or differences in someone's life can be hard. It being hard for us is not an excuse to not talk about these topics and especially not an excuse to not listen. As we take on this responsibility of caring for ourselves and for supporting others in their selfcare think of this life sustaining nourishment.

**So now is the fun part! I have some homework for you all!**

I challenge you to listen more, listen better, and support. Whether that means that you need to slow down and stop talking in order to hear/listen. Whether it means to sit in the discomfort with yourself and other, or whether that means listening to yourself, your body and your triggers so you can reach out for help and/or support when you need it. Active listening is an important tool for those of us who live with mental illness and for those of us who do not, yet, live with it. It could be you one day who needs the listening ear. Listening to yourself and your needs and listen to others and their needs is the homework. Please be honored to walk away with this responsibility.

Thank you.