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Meditation

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“A bird does not sing because it has an answer, it sings because it has a song.”
Chinese proverb

Recently I spoke to a woman living with dementia about her experience with her community of faith. The story she told is, unfortunately, not unique, but it is one that we need to take notice of and listen to carefully. Her story is that when she had a stroke and needed to be in a wheelchair, she was treated differently in her faith community. No one spoke to her, not even the pastor. When she inquired about this with the pastor, he asked, “What would you like us to say?” That may sound like a simple question, but in fact, it is a sign of a deeper issue. Sometimes people do not know what to say to someone living with dementia, and so they choose not to say anything at all. She responded to the pastor that all she wanted was for someone to come up to her and say her name. She wanted to be acknowledged. Isn’t that something that we all want? This does not change when a person is living with dementia.

As in the quote on the top of this page, we don’t need to have an answer, we only need to have a song. As she told me in my conversation, there is no perfect thing that you have to say, just treat me as if I exist. When someone is living with dementia, it can be an isolating experience, but we can change this experience into something precious. What it takes is for us to remember that people living with dementia need connection and relationships just as much as we do.

The woman who told me the story about feeling abandoned by a community that had known her for many years had this advice for us; see me, talk to me, and treat me as if I exist. Who can you reach out to this month to show that they are still important, and how can you show them that you care?