

A Prayer for World Mental Health Day by Alison Webster

God of compassion,
You meant us to be both fragile and ordinary.
Silence the voices that say we are not good enough,
Haven't achieved enough,
Haven't enough to show for our lives,
That we are not enough.
Help us to know that we are treasure,
We are prized,
We are cherished,
We are loved.
Infinitely.
By you.
So be with us in our corrugations of feeling:
When our hearts are in downward freefall, *be with us*
When our minds race with anxiety, *be with us*
When our throats close in fear, *be with us*
When sleep will not come, *be with us*
When waking hurts, *be with us*.
In the name of Jesus,
Who knew trauma, abuse, despair and abandonment
And has nothing but love for us,
Amen.

“By prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be known to God”

Euodia and Syntyche aren't getting along, and Paul is not happy.

Two of his trusted co-workers are experiencing “different minds” about something, and he urges them, and those around them to continue to work together. He thinks so highly of them that he wants the other followers of Jesus to give them support in whatever problem they are dealing with—support to end the conflict. The following sentences outline how those “whose names are in the book of life” can be real followers:

- Rejoice in the Lord. (Paul says that twice.)
- Let your gentleness be known to everyone.
- Realize that the Lord is near.
- Don't worry about anything.
- Let your requests be known to the Lord by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving

The result will be peace unlike any the Phillipi Christians have ever known, keeping hearts and minds in commendable and excellent things, praiseworthy things—those are the things to keep

returning to, time after time. Paul concludes this passage, “...and the God of peace will be with you.”

The peace Paul refers to is the assurance that the Psalmist experienced through trust in God: sure guidance in situations where death may be a close companion; freedom from fear of evil; the comfort that comes from knowing God as leader; the abundance of nourishment and blessing; all these things belong to those who walk in the goodness and mercy available in the place where God dwells.

In times like these, we have a choice. We can trust in God—we can come to the wedding banquet, the mysterious union with God that arises when we turn to him in trust time and again—or we can turn away, with the assurance that God will find someone to sit at that beautiful table. As for the stuff about those who make the choice to turn away being bound hand and foot and thrown into outer darkness—or who do not wear the right wedding garment—there is considerable question about whether Jesus said that in the first place. The punishment far exceeds the supposed crime; the words don’t sound like Jesus, and a wedding garment would not be expected of someone from off the street who did not know he was going to be invited to a grand banquet. We do not know if Jesus said those things. What we do know that is that the “wedding garment” is symbolic as well as material. Such a garment symbolizes the wholeness and completeness that we find in union with God.

Paul says that there is nothing that can separate us from the love of God. The only thing that separates us is our own decision to turn away. If one shares the values present in the Beatitudes, if one manifests humility (or being poor in spirit); if one mourns; if one avoids argument; if one seeks righteousness as a starving person seeks food; if one keeps one’s heart from the darkness of evil—that is, if one maintains purity; if one is peaceful and shares that peace with others; if one bears punishment or discrimination for one’s faith—then one can hope to see heaven.

Such actions weave a garment that is fit to wear in the presence of God.

A friend of ours committed suicide last Monday. He lived his life as a caring, responsible, intelligent and witty person. He was enjoyable company. He attended a great university. He had many friends. And he suffered from depression, and was sure that he could outrun it by keeping busy, helping others, and contributing to our small community in Harpers Ferry. Several people have said, “He was the last person I would have thought would do that.”

As we are all learning in different ways, this time of pandemic is a challenge to our Christian values of loving God, loving our neighbor, and taking the good news into all the world. Our friend lived his life with many of the Christian values. The only thing was: he didn’t have Christ. He relied completely on his own intelligence, and, in the end, that was not enough, because he was too proud to seek help. He told friends who urged him to seek help that he could work it out himself, as he had before; then, he jumped off the side of a mountain.

Some people think that the teachings of Christianity are too difficult because they are demanding. They are not easy, but they are not too demanding if you accept that they come from God, and are intended to lead you to greater closeness with God. Our friend thought that living a moral and ethical life was a part of being an intelligent person. To ask the help of a savior—or a doctor—was to be dependent, and to act from fear. Yet, in the end, it was fear of seeking help that led him to his death, that and the conviction that there was no point in seeking help, because he was smart and HE couldn't reason himself out of his depression, so how could anyone else help him?

To know that there is a loving Presence that can help is the best gift God has ever given us. To accept that others with medical and psychological training can help is to acknowledge the creativity and compassion with which God made other humans. When we have access to that holy strength, we can see our own needs, and sometimes, if they threaten to overwhelm us, we can reach out to others with the knowledge that there is help available from humans as well as from God.

That is one wonderful reason to let our gentleness be known to everyone. That is a quality that makes it easier for a friend to say that they need help. It doesn't mean that they will seek help. Sometimes, pride or fear or just the inertia of depression can get in the way. As we, as Christians, continue to seek union with God, to live lives of prayer and freedom from worry, and to realize that the Lord is near—indeed, that the Kingdom of God is within us—we come closer to that holy union, and the love that results from it shines forth in our lives. It can serve as a beacon for those in need of God's love who do not know how to seek it themselves.

Let your light so shine before all that they may see your good works, and glorify (and seek themselves) your Father in Heaven.

AMEN.