

“Dementia Through the Lens of Grace”

Mt. Hermon Lutheran Church

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INTRODUCTION

- A. Feelings Associated with Dementia
- B. Dementia Is Medical and Spiritual/Theological Challenge

WHAT IS DEMENTIA? <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fmaEql66gB0>

- A. Umbrella Term of Which Alzheimer’s Is the Major Disease
 - a. Constellation of symptoms: memory loss, word-finding difficulties, impaired judgment and problems with day-to-day activities, caused by injury or loss of brain cells (neurons).
 - b. Major forms of dementia: Alzheimer’s Disease, Frontotemporal Dementia, Vascular Disease, Lewy Body, Parkinson’s, Huntington’s, Mixed Dementia, etc.
- B. While Dementia Is Primarily a Disease of the Brain, It Has Multiple Psycho/Social/Spiritual Manifestations: Stigma, Isolation, Diminished Self-image

PREVALENCE

- A. National Statistics: 6.2 million; one in nine people aged 65 and older (11.3); kills more people than breast cancer and prostate cancer combined; Alzheimer’s and dementia deaths increased by 16% during Covid.
- B. South Carolina Statistics: 95,000 aged 65 and over have form of dementia; expected number by 2025 is 125,000; sixth leading cause of death; 119,000 family members provide care.
- C. Disproportionately Prevalent in Mainline Churches
16.5% of U.S. population is over 65; percentage of ELCA members over 65 is 31%; median age of ELCA members is 55 while median age of U.S. population is 38.
This is both a challenge and an opportunity.

DEMENTIA THROUGH THE LENS OF GOD’S GRACE: What does God have to do with dementia?

- A. Medical Lens Focuses on Symptoms and Loses; Grace Focuses on Story and Gifts
 - 1. We are stories, not symptoms
 - 2. We are participants in God’s Story of Grace: the gift of God’s presence and power to create, liberate, restore, reconcile, heal, and transform the whole creation.
- B. Biblical Images of Who and Where God Is and What God Is Doing
 - 1. Creation originates in God’s love/grace, sustained by grace, and will be transformed by grace. Genesis 1:27: “So God created humankind in his image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them.”
 - 2. Liberates from Bondage: Exodus 3:7-8: “Then the Lord said, “I have observed the misery of my people who are in Egypt; I have heard their cry on account of their taskmasters. Indeed, I know their sufferings, and I have come down to deliver them from the Egyptians, and to bring them up out of that land to a good and broad land, a land flowing with milk and honey. . .”

- a. God sees, hears, knows suffering of those in bondage; and comes to deliver
- b. Dementia as form of bondage
3. Visits and restores those in Exile: Isaiah 43:1: “But now thus says the Lord, he who created you, O Jacob, he who formed you, O Israel: Do not fear, for I have redeemed you; I have called you by name, you are mine.”
 - a. God creates us, redeems us, knows us by name, sets us in community
 - b. Dementia as form of exile
4. God from whom we cannot flee: Psalm 139:7: “Where can I go from your spirit? Or where can I flee from your presence
- C. God Becomes Incarnate in Jesus the Christ
 1. John 1:14: “And the Word became flesh and lived among us, and we have seen his glory, the glory as of a father’s soon, full of grace and truth.”
 2. God enters into human experience with its vulnerability, suffering, and death
 3. God is victorious through suffering and death

HUMAN IDENTITY, WORTH, DIGNITY, AND DESTINY HELD BY GOD IN COMMUNITY

- A. Identity Lies in the *Imago Dei*, Created in Image of God, Baptized into Christ
 - Not in physical, psychological, or intellectual qualities or capacities
 - Value is in One to whom belong
- B. Beloved sons and daughters of Triune God
 - 1 John 3:1-2: “See what love the Father has given us, that we should be called children of God; and that is what we are. . . . Beloved, we are God’s children now; what we will has not yet been revealed. What we do know is this: When he is revealed, we will be like him, for we will see him as he is.”
 - Aquinas: “Wayfarers on Way to God”
- C. Identity in community: Stewards of one another’s identity and memories
 - Identity and worth validated and nurtured in relationships
 - All have gifts needed in community

INCARNATION, INDENTITY, AND RELATIONSHIPS WITH PEOPLE WITH DEMENTIA

- A. God Enters Our World
- B. Human Beings as Avenues of Divine Presence: What God did in Jesus God seeks in us. We are vehicles/channels of God’s love and presence to one another.
- C. Most Significant Ministry is **Presence**
Video: Naomi Feil and Gladys Wilson <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CrZXz10FcVM>
- D. Tips for Relating to People with Dementia (Handout)

CLOSING