

Otherness: East Taieri Church SERIES 19th October 2025

S1: Seeing and Understanding the Other: Otherness

We are all different and uniquely made by God. He knew us before we were born, **Psalm 139** says we are fearfully and wonderfully made and knit together in our mother's wombs. Nothing about us is an accident. We are here for now and for such as time as this.

None of us are totally alike. We all think, act and feel differently to each other. The way we express, hide or don't express our emotions are all different. We notice that others are different.

It is when we categorise our differences from others, in good and bad terms that we can have problems. These assumptions about others can lead to judgement and this leads to exclusion-otherness.

Nowhere is this more acutely expressed at times is in the area of mental health. If we have never experienced mental health issues ourselves, in our family or have grown up with intrinsic prejudices about the other. They can be seen as 'those people'. In some cultures and families, sharing feelings and emotion is foreign, feared, almost condemned. Human emotions, historically have been divided into 'good and bad', 'acceptable and unacceptable.' This idea was in text books up to the later 1980's. Human emotion is all from God, it has been tainted by the fall.

Mental health and ill-health is culturally defined. We live in an age of diagnosis that is not often helpful, our need for a label and to be seen and heard.

The language we use is important here. We talk about 'those people,' 'us and them.' We can use terms like 'schizophrenic,' 'depressive,' yet that limits a person's experience. They may have depression but that does not have to define who they are. People will often describe themselves as, 'mad,' 'crazy,' and that is fine if it is the person describing their experience.

We are not alone: Jesus was different and was persecuted for it

He wasn't how they expected him to be. Jesus is above our expectations and the restrictions we want to put around him. Just as we think we have him worked out and boxed in, he surprises us. Jesus was no friend of the so called righteous, they didn't need him. Jesus was sidelined, ridiculed, ignored, his family thought he was mad, they mocked and falsely accused him. He was abandoned and must have felt he stuck out like a sore thumb. He knows the journey and experience of the other.

S2: Christianity & Mental Health

The Christian Church has a long history of meeting the needs of the mentally unwell, from the early church to the monasteries to the institutions that were originally built by Christian people.

We are called to the whole gospel. Jesus said he came to meet the needs of the poor, oppressed, outcast, this was his mandate and it should be ours. The good news is far more than receiving salvation (**Luke 4/Isa 61**). The full gospel is about the transformation of our bodies, souls and spirits. We are called as God's people and as Jesus demonstrated to minister to the outcast, rejected, oppressed and sick.

God is involved in it all.

Many churches are doing incredible work in this area but some are making and have made huge blunders, mainly because they refuse to include people who work in this area to help.

There has been a growing need and interest in mental health in our churches past few years as more people are presenting with mental health distress and illness. Some of this comes from greater awareness but also from the way society has changed and the pressure people face.

S3: Safety: Look after yourself

I don't know your own history of mental health, unless you've shared it with me. Some of the material you hear may be confronting. If you are upset, offended, please seek support. If what I talk about activates things for you, please seek support, even move yourself if needed. If you notice others do this please go after them too. People are praying and available out the back.

S4: My Story

Paul Reet's personal story of his own mental health journey was shared at this point.

S5: The Good Samaritan Luke 10 vs 30-37 A story of Otherness (1) It wasn't the man's fault-life happened to him

The man was , beaten, left half dead and naked, striped, everything was taken from him. This can be the lived experience of people with mental health issues. It is as though their life they once knew has been take away from them.

Mental health issues can affect us all and take us by surprise. Often after a time of stress and pressure we can be vulnerable. It is like the body is catching up. I have lost count of the amount of people over the years who have come to see me when their mental health is breaking down who say things like, 'I've always coped before, I don't know what's happening to me.'

Most people do not make up or bring illness on themselves. There may be contributing factors but most people don't want to be sick depressed or anxious to such an extent that their lives are constricted. It is not their failure or fault. Some people have attachment disruptions in their early lives that leaves them vulnerable to mental health issues. Some people are disadvantaged from the start- foetal alcohol syndrome and a general, ongoing, violent, unsupportive environment as they grew up. Some people are susceptible to mental illness because of a genetic link.

Finding reasons- Yet too many people can be like Jobs's friend's who couldn't help themselves trying to find a reason for what had happened to him.

1.Using Sinning as the excuse for their distress and this is very harmful. Biblical records in the NT, suggest in some cases sin may be the cause of sickness but not always. Jesus, when answering the question about the man born blind, who sinned him or his parents, he replies, '**Neither but this was for the glory of God.**' (John 9). God uses affliction for purification and redemption.

2.People make huge assumptions that people who are 'crazy,' might be demon-possessed. It is an easy assumption when we do not understand and so to make us feel safe, we categorise people in very black and white terms. There is an assumption we can solve or fix it, fast and we are often not prepared to do the long haul with people.

3.Always seeing spiritual causes for MH problems. Often it is physical and psychological (soul) issues that contribute towards mental health issues. Demonology, often misunderstood can be present in all spheres of life, including Church life, not just in people who appear to be irrational. It is also present in manipulation, coercion, need for power and control and holding back information over people as power.

4.'It's something they're not doing,' People can't always 'pull themselves together' or 'get over it'. If they could they would.

S6: The Good Samaritan Luke 10 vs 30-37 A story of Otherness (2): Religious exclusion

In the bible reading today the question that prefaces Jesus' parable was about the greatest commandment ? (**Luke 10 v 30**). Loving God and loving your neighbour. Our love for others comes first from a love of God because he loved us. This means we can choose to love those

we might find unlovely because God doesn't see them like we might. Behind this parable was the question- **'Who is my neighbour?'**

The Samaritan crossed cultural lines, that had been embedded in that part of the country for centuries, since the Northern Kingdom of Israel fell. The two men SAW HIM but chose '*passed over the other side of the path*' this was deliberate rules had become more important than compassion. The religious leaders kept a distance because of the restrictions they were under and it prevented helping someone in need. For the religious leaders of Jesus' day it meant a whole process of cleansing.

We too can our restrictions towards others, often built into the attitude of our heart that can come at times in our speech and behaviour. Sometimes we are totally unaware it is happening. These attitudes toward 'the other,' are based on our own religious assumptions, ignorance, fears, prejudices and expectations on how people should behave

We can push away difficult issues in people and in ourselves like mental health concerns because we get scared by what we don't know or understand. We can get upset by because we don't know what to do with it. It also brings up our own 'demons,' things that may be activated in us that need dealing with when we see others in distress. The worst thing we can do is ignore them and try and push them away, they just grow and get worse; like rubbish in a bin, we keep pushing it down but eventually it comes back.

S7: The Good Samaritan Luke 10 vs 30-37 A story of Otherness (3): Risk Taking to help the other

He also took a personal risk. He could have easily have been attacked. He took risks to even stop but the first thing he did was tend to his wounds meeting his physical and emotional needs then took him in his donkey to a place of safety.

The Samaritan, unexpectedly, violated rules. For many people who have worked with the mentally ill, it is risky, it takes energy, time and patience.

We sometimes need to take a risk to learn to understand what the other is experiencing. Don't avoid but enter in as Jesus did. No people group were excluded from him.

S8: The Good Samaritan Luke 10 vs 30-37 A story of Otherness (4) The Samaritan demonstrated mercy and went the extra mile (v 37)

1. Working with others is always messy whether it is physical or emotional. What the Samaritan saw was a battered, bloodied man, it was messy. He didn't only leave him on the road to fend for himself he went further and followed through. He came alongside to help and demonstrated mercy. He got him in a hotel and 'took care of him,' he followed through in his commitment and he went the extra mile in leaving an open account to make sure he was being cared for. ***The other cares for the other.*** We are all the other sometime.

2. Let us not give up on people. The Samaritan saw it through and so does Jesus. Many people are branded as being in the 'too-hard basket.' We are called to these people society rejects and gives up on. We can be impatient, believing there are easy solutions and not prepared to see it through. Please do not promise what you can't deliver. Please keep on offering and being prepared to pray for them.

3. We need to be creative in how we support people and again go the extra mile. Often people who are depressed would find a worship setting like we do Church or the very helpful Christian disciplines and Church expressions/activities a challenge.

- Difficulty concentrating.
- Anxiety being close to other people.
- Distressed person may not hear you, may be preoccupied
- Racing thoughts and speech, we can make this worse.

S9: What do you see?

Images of mental health suffers and survivors

What the Samaritan saw, was a man beaten, bleeding and helpless. It drove him to merciful and compassionate acts. We can be moved, as Jesus was with compassion, from the gut. What happens when God moves us in this way is that it undoubtedly leads to action. There times we have no compassion? He can give us His compassion even if it is inconvenient and unpopular.

The difficulty with mental health we can't always SEE it . ***'It's like a broken leg in your head,'*** We sometimes have to notice changes in people in how they relate and behave.

S10: Letters to Hamish

Letter sent to a friend about a person's experience of mental illness was read out.

S11: Conclusions

1. LISTEN-Be a witness to their story, you listening to them communicates, their value.
2. ASSUME NOT-even if you have had similar issues, remember their story is unique, no one experiences MH issues the same.
3. BE SENSITIVE – don't rush in with platitudes and needing to fix it
4. ACCEPT-don't judge