



OESTERLEN

Empowering Individuals to Thrive

Sermon Prompts
for Sundays,
September 19-October 10,
using Revised Common Lectionary
and prompts for a stand-alone sermon
for World Mental Health Day



September is **Suicide Prevention Month** and **National Recovery Month**

October 3-9 is **Mental Illness Awareness Week**

October 10 is **World Mental Health Day**

Please see additional resources at
<https://oesterlen.org/mental-health-resources-for-congregations/>



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MENTAL HEALTH AWARENESS

SERMON PROMPTS

Sermon prompts are written by Pastor Shari Ayers, Columbus, Ohio.

September 19, 2021 – Pentecost 17B

Jeremiah 11:18-30; Psalm 54; James 3:13-4:3;
Mark 9:30-37

How do individuals relate to one another? How is radical community formed? Mark 9:30-37 invites us to consider such questions.

As happens frequently in Mark's Gospel, the disciples here fail to "get" what Jesus says and does. Rather than asking for clarification, the disciples live into a cycle to which we can relate. Their silence leads to further misinterpretation, which leads to shame and more silence. Most of us have had some experience with the impact of silence and fear. We know what it is like to say nothing for fear of saying the wrong thing. This can be especially true when someone we love is in physical, mental, or emotional pain. It is helpful when organizations such as the National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI) remind us that "It's Okay to Talk About Suicide" and other challenging topics.

https://www.nami.org/NAMI/media/NAMI-Media/Infographics/NAMI_Suicide_2020_FINAL.pdf



Another interesting piece of this story is the role of the child embraced by Jesus. It can be easy for us to miss the shocking nature of this exchange. The modern image of childhood is one of carefree innocence, but in the context of Mark's Gospel, children were not regarded with gentleness and hope. In fact, children were not regarded at all. They existed on the margins, without power or protection beyond their immediate families. Some children in our midst today also experience trauma. Organizations such as Oesterlen, a Lutheran mental health agency for children, youth and families in Springfield, OH, can witness to the hardships that children face, and the healing that is possible. NAMI also provides a sobering look at the so-called carefree nature of childhood.

<https://www.nami.org/get-involved/awareness-events/suicide-prevention-awareness-month>



When Jesus embraces a child from the crowd, he is aligning himself with all those who are vulnerable and overlooked. Why not use this Sunday to lift up our calling to care for and advocate for those who are struggling this day with thoughts of suicide, especially young people? Our response doesn't have to be silence and fear; it can be radical welcome and care instead.

September 26, 2021 – Pentecost 18B

Numbers 11:4-6, 10-16, 24-29; Psalm 19:7-14;
James 5:13-20; Mark 9:38-50

The verses from Numbers 11 appointed for today were selected because of the references in both Numbers 11:26-29 and Mark 9:38-40 to those who are doing the work of God from outside the community. Together, these two passages help us to recognize that the boundaries that separate us also limit our ability to see how and where God is at work in the world.

Individuals living with mental illness sometimes feel excluded from communities in which they previously experienced love and support, such as their families, congregations, and social groups. The stigma attached to mental illness leads to a situation in which individuals are defined by their illness, rather than being recognized as a whole person with gifts to share. Numbers 11 and Mark 9 invite us to see God at work beyond boundaries and beyond limits.

The Numbers passage offers other preaching opportunities as well. This rich and abundant story gives us a glimpse of the wilderness experience both through the hopelessness of the people and through the frustration of Moses. For the people, the wilderness is a place of anxiety and fear. They can't see the future, but they know they are consumed with cravings in the present. This could be a Sunday to speak to the challenges of substance abuse and the opioid epidemic:

<https://www.nami.org/Blogs/NAMI-Blog/June-2018/Opioids-and-Substance-Abuse-What-Can-We-Do>



For Moses, the wilderness will come to be a place to accept his limitations. Verse 14 is a poignant cry: "I am not able to carry all this people alone, for they are too heavy for me." Why not allow the human need and struggle in the book of Numbers to have a voice this Sunday? These verses can be an invitation to find new ways to support one another and listen to one another in times of crisis. They can be a call to walk together as a community so that no one has to carry illness or sorrow or caregiving alone.

October 3, 2021 – Pentecost 19B (beginning of Mental Illness Awareness Week)

Genesis 2:18-24; Psalm 8; Hebrews 1:1-4; 2:5-12;
Mark 10:2-16

Mark 10:2-16 grabs our attention quickly, focusing as it does on the fragility of human relationships—as well as on a deep hope for them. This passage could provide a time for God's people to be honest about the brokenness both around us and within.

We have all had times in our lives when our hearts were hardened against those closest to us. We have allowed friendships, partnerships, and all manner of other relationships to crumble under the weight of neglect. We have torn "asunder" (in the older language of Mark 10:9) many of the community connections that God desires for us.

This Sunday is the beginning of Mental Illness Awareness Week (October 3 – 9). We might use this Sunday to address the isolation that many experience as they live with mental illness:

<https://www.nami.org/Blogs/NAMI-Blog/June-2020/From-Isolation-to-Community-and-Change>



These passages from Mark 10 and Genesis 2 speak to the life-giving potential for community that is woven into creation. Even though we are all capable of breaking those connections, we hold out hope of restoration and renewal. When faith-based organizations recognize those living with mental illness in our midst and focus on hospitality and support, we can help reduce stigma and isolation. We can remind one another and ourselves that it is not good for any of God's children to be alone.

October 10, 2021 – Pentecost 20B (World Mental Health Day)

Amos 5:6-7, 10-15; Psalm 90:12-17;
Hebrews 4:12-16; Mark 10:17-31

The passages selected for today are filled with stories of great reversals and changes of perspective. They are rich in images that speak to how we use our resources and how we care for one another.

The prophet Amos issues a challenge to those who use their power and privilege to oppress the poor and the marginalized. His language is forceful as he reprimands those who would "trample" and "push aside" a neighbor in need.

Jesus shares the prophet Amos's concern for the poor. And he also has deep concern for the rich man who seeks to follow him, the one whose abundance is getting in his way. The coming reign of God will turn upside down our notions of first and last, of scarcity and plenty.

This might be a day to think about the ways in which poverty, homelessness, and global inequities create additional barriers for those living with mental illness and substance abuse.

https://www.who.int/health-topics/mental-health#tab=tab_1



As we think about how we might advocate for and stand with those in need, we have the letter to the Hebrews to give us strength and courage. Hebrews 4:15-16 reminds us that Jesus identifies with us in the fullness of our humanity, such as when we struggle or when we feel overwhelmed by the needs in the world. What would it look like today for the church to "approach the throne of grace with boldness," so that all of creation might experience mercy in time of need?

Sermon Prompt for Thematic Preaching for World Mental Health Day, October 10

"One Body. One Community. One Hope"

Sermon Text: 1 Corinthians 12:12-26

The early Christian church at Corinth is a source of hope and encouragement for the imperfect among us, which is to say, for all of us. Paul's letters to the Corinthians reveal a glimpse into this feisty group of saints and sinners. They bicker with one another. They fuss about who is most important. They boast about all of the wrong things.

And yet, they are a community of believers. They are part of the body of Christ. And it seems Paul loves them in spite of themselves. Not only that, Paul hopes that they will also come to love themselves and one another. It turns out that, in a book with much to say about brokenness and strife, Paul also has much to say about love.

"If one member suffers, all suffer together with it; if one member is honored, all rejoice together with it."
(1 Corinthians 12:26)

October 10th is World Mental Health Day. It is a perfect time for congregations to listen together to words like 1 Corinthians 12:12-26 and to give thanks for the complexity and the giftedness of the whole body of Christ. We can work together to advocate for brothers and sisters living with mental illness; we can seek to be places of hospitality and support. Such callings are holy and they are important.

The challenge for people of faith is to recognize that sometimes the language we use to speak hospitality, well-meaning though it is, can increase stigmas around mental illness. When we hear and study this passage together, it can remind us that those living with mental illness are not only recipients of Christian love. They are also the hands and the feet and the ears and the eyes of the body of Christ. They are not out there. They/we are members of our ministries and our communities. They/we are living with mental illness. What touches one of us, touches us all.

The National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI) provides a number of faith-based resources for congregations:

<https://www.nami.org/Get-Involved/NAMI-FaithNet>





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MENTAL HEALTH COUNSELING

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