

FOSTERING A CULTURE OF RESILIENCE

PSYCHO-SPIRITUAL INSIGHTS FOR MINISTRY

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PROLOGUE: RESCUED VS REDEEMED

- ▶ The Lazarus story is a way for early Christians to understand that Jesus does not usually give special exemptions for his friends. Jesus treats Lazarus the way he is treated by God.
- ▶ Jesus on the Cross is intimately and deeply loved by the Father, yet he is not spared humiliation, pain, and death. Jesus is jeered by the crowd but there is no rescue.
- ▶ “...Jesus never promised us rescue, exemptions, immunity from cancer, or escape from death.” (Rolheiser, *The Passion and the Cross*, 2015)
- ▶ “The cross and resurrection of Jesus reveal a redeeming, not a rescuing, God.”

SOME PSYCHOLOGICAL IMPACTS OF MINISTRY

- ▶ **COMPASSION FATIGUE:** vicarious or secondary trauma, emotional residue of exposure that counselors, ministers, other helping professionals have from working with people as they are hearing their trauma stories and become witnesses to the pain, fear, and terror that trauma survivors have endured.
- ▶ Data shows that helping professionals who are most deeply affected by their work are often the best and the brightest in the field- *they are the most caring of individuals!*
- ▶ Response to CF: Professional support or caregiver group, make self-care a priority, network of friends, taking time off, reorganizing schedule

INDIVIDUAL PRACTICES FOR RESILIENCE

- ▶ Some practices that prevent, offer an antidote to and prepare for lockdown, grief and compassion fatigue for individuals: Self-soothing, self compassion, sleep and dream work, and contemplative prayer as divine therapy (developed in next slides)
- ▶ The focus of those individual practices, as Teresa of Avila said of mental prayer or *heartfulness* (and not mindfulness), is to develop *love of neighbor, humility and detachment*; we self-soothe to become soothing, we are self-compassionate to be compassionate, we rest to be restful, we do contemplative prayer to be a contemplative presence

SELF-SOOTHING: HALLMARK OF EMOTIONAL RESILIENCE

- ▶ Emotional “sobriety” learning to live in the mid range (5), and stay away from extremes of highs (5-10) or lows (0-5)
- ▶ Moves us away from limbic system; the flight/fight/freeze, survival mode towards pre-frontal cortex, conscious living; into our thinking mode
- ▶ Self-soothing through warm bath, sunlight, pleasant odors (baked bread example), silent prayer, human connection & interaction, positive recall, limit virus talk, be reasonably well informed, get extra sleep, rest, relaxation

SELF-COMPASSION (Dr. Kristin Neff)

A STANCE OF NON-JUDGMENT BY TREATING ONESELF WITH CARE AND CONCERN

- ▶ It is composed of three interrelated components: self-kindness, humanity and mindfulness.
- ▶ SC helps us move away from self-critical thinking; or toxic self-talk; we accept ourselves as flawed and imperfect
- ▶ Self-compassion is linked with emotional resilience, greater capacity to interact with and be intimate with others, a sense of well-being
- ▶ Self-esteem requires feeling better than others, building one's ego while SC requires acknowledging that we share part of the human condition & imperfect



SELF-COMPASSION (Dr. Kristin Neff)

A STANCE OF NON-JUDGMENT BY TREATING ONESELF WITH CARE AND CONCERN

- ▶ SC can be a protective factor to lower PTSD responses, lower depression, help with personal relationships & help sticking to diets and quitting smoking
- ▶ Research shows people who are SC are less likely to fall into victimization and self-pity
- ▶ Research also indicates SC more effective a motivator than self-punishment



DEVELOPING SELF-COMPASSION

- ▶ A practice: Soften the self-critical voice, speak or write letter to oneself as one would a friend or how Jesus would speak to you, think of how one can help a person in pain and turn it towards oneself
- ▶ Hold difficult emotions by describing them, texturizing them, naming them, using symbolic language, locating them in your body
- ▶ Self compassionate imagery, speak to fears about self-compassion
- ▶ See what are the advantages and disadvantages to self-criticism, frame self-compassion as only advantages of self-criticism

THE SCIENCE OF SLEEP

“Scientists have discovered a revolutionary new treatment that makes you live longer. It enhances your memory, makes you more attractive. It keeps you slim and lowers food cravings. It protects you from cancer and dementia. It wards off colds and flu. It lowers your risk of heart attacks and stroke, not to mention diabetes. You’ll even feel happier, less depressed, and less anxious. Are you interested?” (Matthew Walker, PhD, Why We Sleep, 2017)

THAT TREATMENT IS CALLED SLEEP!

THE SCIENCE OF SLEEP (CONT'D)

- ▶ Lack of sleep: baseline for most North Americans, affects our mental and physical health (lack on average 90 minutes per night)
- ▶ In the healthy living triad, sleep trumps and drives the other two: diet and exercise
- ▶ ****Sleep fosters neural resilience or “introspective life view” (like therapy) since REM sleep dissolves visceral painful emotional charge of memories & helps integrating them in autobiographical perspective****

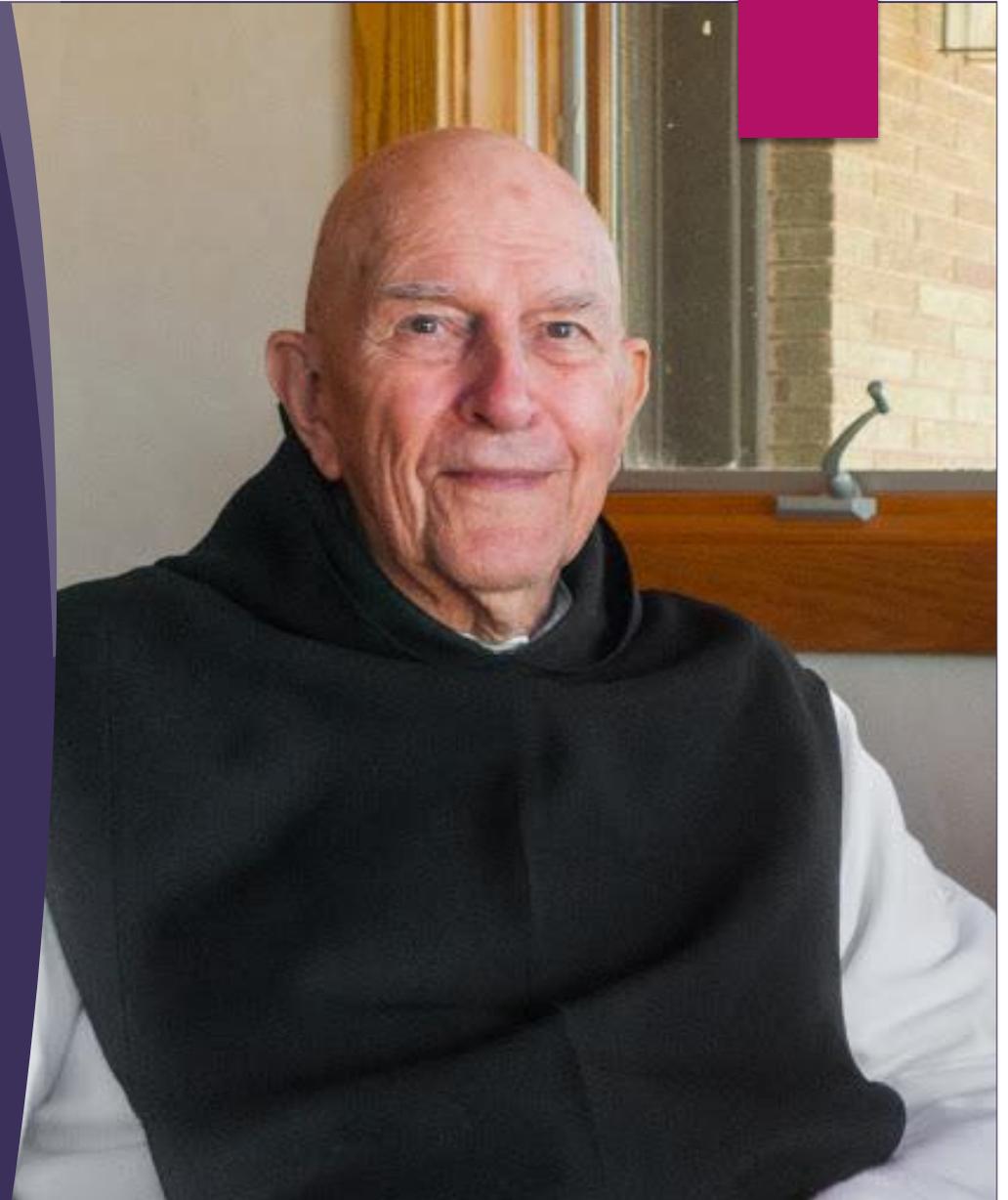
PAYING ATTENTION TO DREAMS

- ▶ Sleeping St. Joseph teaches us that in silence and sleep we trust God speaks (in our dreams) and then are called to act on what we have “heard”
- ▶ Judeo-Christian way of dreamwork: dreams are found in the Old and New Testaments; prophet Daniel, Jacob’s dream, Joseph in Old and in the New : Joseph, Peter and other examples in book of Acts. It is connected to how the Holy Spirit can speak to people while they sleep and offer divine guidance.
- ▶ References to dreams in the writings of early Church fathers such as Justin Martyr, Irenaeus, Clement of Alexandria, Origen, John Chrysostom, Tertullian, and Cyprian of Carthage. Cyprian affirmed that the councils of the Church were guided by God through dreams and visions.
- ▶ Some dreams possess a revelatory quality: continue conversation or share with a trusted person by interacting with important images and figures of wisdom or buried pain, grief or traumas that require our attention

FOUR MOVEMENTS OF THE CYCLE OF CENTERING PRAYER AS *DIVINE THERAPY*

- ▶ 1st **SACRED WORD**: beginning of prayer
- ▶ 2nd **REST**: sense of God's presence, peace, interior silence
- ▶ 3rd **UNLOADING**: defense mechanisms relax, unconscious material comes up in form of bombardment of thoughts or primitive emotions
- ▶ 4th **EVACUATION** of primitive emotions and thoughts and return to sacred word

Represents psychological dynamics of years of prayer. Each cycle moves towards a divine center. God is the psychotherapist



PRACTICES FOR RESILIENT COMMUNITIES

- ▶ **THREE COMMUNITY PRACTICES:** 1. Creating safe resilient spaces 2. Identifying and supporting resilient actors 3. Establishing structures and connections of resilient companionship
- ▶ All of them include creative ways to express warmth, mutual support, passion of love: the Holy Spirit can be called *the sensitivity of God*, a view of humans participating in the Trinity
- ▶ The Holy Spirit as sensitivity of God: how Son and Father express attractions, manifesting their hearts, their emotions, their sentiments, their passions, to one another in a most striking yet ordered fantasy of creative and redeeming divine love energy
- ▶ It is in opposition to the anti-spiration of the devil that generates glacial wind with his huge bat like wings sitting on a throne of ice (cf. Dante's *Divine Comedy; Inferno, Canto XXXIV*)

CHRISTIAN RESILIENCE

- ▶ Trauma & resilience studies help us understand our faith by preventing platitudes of being tested by God, desiring to be rescued and face & honor suffering honestly without glorifying it; wounds remain
- ▶ Resilience is a spiritual motivational force inherent in humans and non-humans, it is not created out of will, it involves a participation
- ▶ In Christian setting this participation is aligned with the idea of prevenient grace; it is a gift of God and a sign of God
- ▶ Medical model is limited and must be challenged; Christian resilience not about managing adversities with tenaciousness energy: the end point might not be growth or even a (visible) positive outcome, becoming A BEARER OF THE CROSS, a symbol of God's action in the world

CHRISTIAN ACTS OF RESILIENCE: SYMBOL OF GOD'S ACTION IN THE WORLD

“...the Christian act of resilience turns the actor into a symbol of God’s action in the world: whether it is the German sisters on their doomed ship, Stein in her filthy cattle wagon, or any depressed or lonely patient seeking meaning in a meaningless world. These, for the Christian, must all be ways to know God, especially God at the foot of the Cross, which are expressed symbolically. In this respect the artist, poet, musician and liturgist are the ‘high-priests’ of resilience – for in their symbolic language the outward sign of resilience is manifest.”

(Peter Tyler, “The Science of the Cross: Edith Stein and Resilience”, Biblical and Theological visions of Resilience, 2020)

JULIAN OF NORWICH

14th C. English anchoress

- ▶ Her book *Shewings* portrays a gentle motherly “homely” God of mercy and an enduring trust in God’s benevolent will
- ▶ All of Europe, and the town of Norwich: three series of plagues, protracted religious and political conflicts
- ▶ Plagues killed her husband and her young child, near death at 30 had a deep mystical experience of crucified and risen Jesus as she was touched and blessed by a crucifix



JULIAN OF NORWICH

14th C. English anchoress

- ▶ Julian refused to give into widespread view that chaos of disease and war = divine punishment for lack of religious practice and dissolute moral living
- ▶ Her eremitical life devoted to prayer yields intimacy with Jesus, flooded her soul with hope: *“But Jesus... answered with these words and said: ‘It was necessary (useful) that there should be sin, but all shall be well, and all shall be well, and all manner of thing shall be well.’ These words were said most tenderly, showing no manner of blame to me nor to any who shall be saved.”*



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