

Depression & Hope

I don't know how many of you know this, but the late Robin Williams was an Episcopalian. He shared in a comedy special, "The top 10 reasons for being an Episcopalian."

10. No snake handling.
9. You can believe in dinosaurs.
8. Male and female God created them; male and female we ordain them.
7. You don't have to check your brains at the door.
6. Pew aerobics-Up, down, kneel, sit, up down, kneel, sit.
5. The church year is color-coded.
4. Free wine on Sunday.
3. All of the pageantry and none of the guilt.
2. You don't have to know how to swim.

And the number one reason for being an Episcopalian..

No matter what you believe, there's bound to be one other Episcopalian who agrees.

**Robin Williams helped us to laugh...Great loss when he took his life...Grateful memories
Mork & Mindy...Comedy specials...Entertaining our troops**

Depression is Real: Robin Williams had a life long battle with depression and it's one of the reasons he was a comedic genius. Laughter kept him going.

Some of the symptoms of depression are clear, but unless we recognize them, they can go unnoticed. Symptoms include hopelessness, guilt, no energy, indecisive, insomnia or always sleeping, slowed down life, thoughts of death or suicide and no pleasure in life.

In fact, I don't know about you, but as I'm beginning to share about depression, I'm getting depressed. I struggle sharing this message, but find it timely. The Association for Anxiety & Depression has found depression affects 40 million Americans 18 years and older (18% of population). It's highly treatable, but one 1/3 receive treatment at a cost of 42 billion per year. It arises from complex set of risk factors that include genetics, brain chemistry and life events. Depression may be related to one or an assortment of these factors.

Depression rates have increased in the US and worldwide, making it a world health epidemic. Dr. Liberman, an expert in depression explains it's "anger turned inward toward the self. Wherever this anger is coming from, it's a form of self-hatred. This anger is self-destructive and therefore harmful to the body." This shows how powerful our thoughts are. The bible shares "Be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what the good and acceptable will of God is." Our thoughts are powerful!

According to the National Institute of Mental Health, 40% of those who suffer from PTSD, 75% of those with eating disorders, 50% of Parkinson patients, 25% of cancer victims and 66% of suicides struggle with depression. Depression is real. We try to avoid it and don't want to hang around depressed people because their depressing. If we're honest with ourselves, we've had a few of these symptoms. We need to face depression in ourselves and others, know it doesn't make us a loser and we don't have to face it alone.

What do we do? Be honest that depression happens and being to know the symptoms so we can name it. Jan and I were having a conversation about someone the other day, and as we noted what was going on in this person's life, Jan stated she was depressed. She was able to recognize the symptoms and identify what was going on. We need to be able to see what's going on in other people's lives and name it. It doesn't mean we go up to a person and say to them, Hey, I've been observing you and watching your life and I think you're depressed. I'm not going to hang with you anymore or have anything to do with you. Don't do that! I'm saying we need to be honest about depression in our lives, family members, others we work or our neighbors. Remember the symptoms of depression, and if you have a cluster of these symptoms, you probably have depression.

What the next step? Be professionally assessed by a Doctor or Counselor; Someone who can professionally assess you, consider your symptoms, ask questions about your lifestyle. Remember, depression can be hormonal or lifestyle. I've had people say to me, "You know Fr. Joe, I drink for my depression. It helps me to forget about it." But guess what else your drinking is doing to you? It's making you more depressed because alcohol is a depressant. Did I just turn a light bulb on for some people...I think I did! So if you have been drinking to deal with your depression, I want you to know that you have been making your depression worse because it's a depressant. Drinking is one of the last things you want to do if you're depressed. This is one of things that can come out from the counsel of others.

Come and talk to your priest or counselor who can work toward healing for you. Remember, depression can be hormonal, genetic, due to lifestyle or sin. The one thing I don't want us to do is dismiss it. How many times have you shared with someone, "I'm going through a really tough time and I'm in a hole. I don't know if I'm going to get out of it. And their response was "Don't worry, you'll eventually get out of it." Maybe they will, maybe they won't. That's the last thing you want to say to someone going thru depression because what you've basically said to them is you don't care about them.

The best thing you and I can do is listen to someone who is depressed. They may go on and on, they don't stop, but that's probably because no one has been listening to them because they're so depressed. Listening is healing. After you've listened to them, you may have an opportunity to pray for them or make a healing suggestion to visit a doctor, counselor or listen to this sermon by Fr. Joe. You don't want to be the last person to hear their cry for help and do nothing for them.

There are people in the Bible who have struggled with depression. People who wanted their lives to end, yet knew who God was. They had sung praises and prayed to Him. Knew what it was to be in a company of people who believed and they were struggling with depression.

Biblical people who struggled with depression include Jonah. I would have struggled too in the belly of a whale. Job and "his friends", King Saul and King David, Esther. Some decided to press into God during their struggle and followed Psalm 42:5 which shares "Why are you cast down, O my soul? And why are you disquieted within me? Hope in God for I shall yet praise him."

Translation: I'm in the dumps, a hole and I'm despairing. Why is this going on and happening to me. Verse 7 shares "Put your trust in God for I will yet praise him." As one part of his soul is despairing, another part of him is crying out "Have hope, trust in God for you will ultimately praise Him at the end of the day. He affirms again his soul is heavy in verse 8, then extols his hope in God in the remaining verses of this Psalm. So we read the psalmist going back and forth between a soul that is depressed, heavy-heavyhearted, and the soul knows this and is owning this struggle and darkness. And it's saying why am I so depressed and struggling? I need to hope in God and put my trust in him. This describes me on some days...back & forth & back & forth!!!

What the psalmist affirms for us today is that God was with him, even in the hole, that dark place because he invited God to be with him. "In the night season, his song is with me, a prayer to the God of my life."

I want you to know something. When you or someone you love is in that dark hole, and you're trying to come up with reasons to live, you know what God is doing? He's right there with you, He's pulling for you, He's actually singing songs over you, Songs of deliverance, healing and hope!! You remember David's relationship with Bathsheba, how he slept with her and she became pregnant, had her husband Uriah killed, and as he was all caught up in what he was doing and enjoying his relationship with Bathsheba, God sent his prophet Nathan, who told a little story about someone who stole the only lamb a man had, and Nathan told David "You are the man!" David was convicted and began to pray, fasted, ask for forgiveness, endured and God delivered him. The baby died, but God forgave David.

What does hope look like during the darkness and depression of your life? I want to share a true story of what it looked like for a man driving to the San Francisco bridge to jump off and commit suicide...He had enough of life and had tried so many times, but no more. As he was driving to the bridge, he heard God speak to him crystal clear...

"If you're willing to take your life, are you willing to give it to me?" That's what hope is. God spoke to that man before he got to the bridge that day because God wanted that man to live. That man didn't jump off the bridge that day, thank God. He came to God and worked thru his depression and now his hope is in the Lord God Almighty. Beloved, I have a word of encouragement for you today. I want you to know something about your life and those around you. God wants you to live. God loves life and He loves your life because He created life.

When he created you, He said it was good and it's still good. No matter how dark and deep the depression gets, may you and I have the grace in this moment to look up and have a hope and trust in God that he can bring us safely to the other side."

Fr. Joe Maiocco