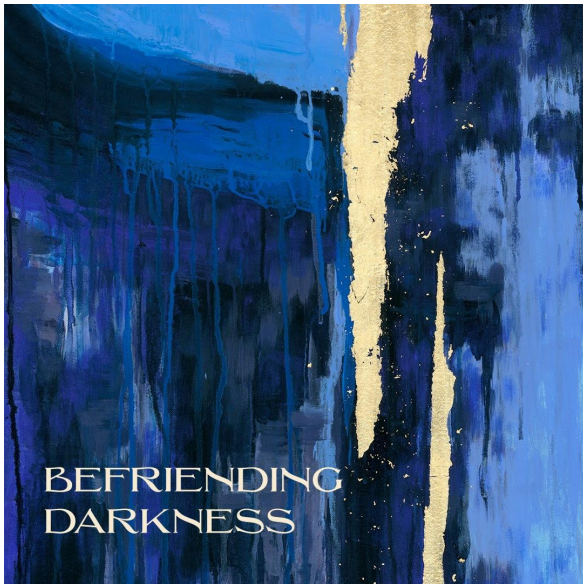


BEFRIENDING DARKNESS

November 5, 2023

Michael Swartzentruber, Senior Minister



PSALM 88

Lord, you are the God who saves me;
day and night I cry out to you.

2 May my prayer come before you;
turn your ear to my cry.

3 I am overwhelmed with troubles
and my life draws near to death.

4 I am counted among those who go down
to the pit;
I am like one without strength.

5 I am set apart with the dead,
like the slain who lie in the grave,
whom you remember no more,
who are cut off from your care.

6 You have put me in the lowest pit,
in the darkest depths.

7 Your wrath lies heavily on me;
you have overwhelmed me with all your
waves.[d]

8 You have taken from me my closest friends
and have made me repulsive to them.

I am confined and cannot escape;

9 my eyes are dim with grief.

I call to you, Lord, every day;

I spread out my hands to you.

10 Do you show your wonders to the dead?

Do their spirits rise up and praise you?

11 Is your love declared in the grave,
your faithfulness in Destruction[e]?

12 Are your wonders known in the place of
darkness,
or your righteous deeds in the land of
oblivion?

13 But I cry to you for help, Lord;

in the morning my prayer comes before
you.

14 Why, Lord, do you reject me
and hide your face from me?

15 From my youth I have suffered and been
close to death;

I have borne your terrors and am in
despair.

16 Your wrath has swept over me;
your terrors have destroyed me.

17 All day long they surround me like a flood;
they have completely engulfed me.

18 You have taken from me friend and
neighbor—
darkness is my closest friend.

REFLECT & DISCUSS

1. Read the passage slowly. Then take a deep breath and read it again. What word, phrase or image stands out to you?
2. The Psalms are like the songbook of the people of God. They reflect many different sentiments, realities, hopes, and even distress. Psalm 88 is a lament. It reflects the deep anguish and sense of despair that can hit human life and whole communities, as likely happened with those in Israel

South Elkhorn Christian Church (Disciples of Christ)

4343 Harrodsburg Road, Lexington KY 40513

859-223-1433 southelkhorncc.org

exiled by conquering armies. What are personal or collective “traumas” that might create this sense of anguish now?

3. What does it mean to you that a Psalm like this has a place in our faith tradition?
4. Have you ever experienced a season in your life when you felt as though “darkness is my closest friend” (v.18)? What has helped you in those difficult and distressing seasons?
5. It can be quite difficult to find the words or supportive presence for someone who expresses the **lament and anguish glimpsed in this psalm**. What are some supportive and helpful things you’ve discovered when caring for those in distress? What have people done for you or said to you that was meaningful or comforting?
6. **Stigma remains** in religious circles when it comes to **mental health** and seeking therapy or counseling. People can still feel as if their faith or spirituality is somehow defective, as if prayer or bible reading should be enough to “cure” them of their suffering. How can the church better witness to the importance and spiritual significance of mental health, counseling, and therapy? How can the church be a source of healing and support for people seeking to love God, others, and *themselves*—in *mind*, soul and strength?
7. People carry all kinds of wounds, including “**religious trauma**” from

experiences in church that were hateful, harmful, shaming,, or abusive. Those brave enough to show up to a new church, including South Elkhorn, might still struggle with a sense of safety, no matter how much love and welcome is spoken and extended.

What are some kinds of “religious trauma” people might carry?

What about a worship service might still set off a feeling of overwhelm?

DEFINITIONS AND RESOURCES

Trauma - the result of the physiological experience of overwhelm—which happens when something that is too much, too fast, or too soon threatens our ability to cope and return to a felt sense of safety and could be set off by virtually anything.

- *When Religion Hurt* by Laura E. Anderson

Stigma - something that evokes distance, ridicule, belittlement, and other negative feelings towards a person or situation.

- From “Sacred Stories” Toolkit found at <https://ncchurches.org/sacred-series-toolkit-becoming-a-trauma-informed-faith-community/>

Mental Health Counseling or Therapy are important resources for coping and healing: from anxiety and depression, to grief and transition, and especially trauma. Prayer and other spiritual practices are good, but they are not a replacement for counseling or therapy. South Elkhorn can provide referrals and support.

Listen Online

Sermon audio available at southelkhorncc.org/sermons