



Saint John United Methodist Church
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Message for January 29, 2023
"Health Assessment: Emotions"
Speaker: Pastor Tom Grieb
Scripture: Proverbs 15:13, 30; 17:22

Cloudy Days

I had someone ask me the other day if our refurbished stained-glass window had some sort of film over it. It seemed darker to them. I quickly responded that it didn't and said, "*The reason the window seems darker these days is there hasn't been much sun.*"

My goodness, we have had a lot of cloudy days recently. I suppose it just comes with winter. The hymn, *In the Bleak Mid-Winter* comes by its name honestly.

We talked about it just a bit at Christmas. We mentioned it in the context of the light of Christ coming into the world. If you remember we talked just briefly about Seasonal Affective Disorder or SAD. The lack of sunlight this time of year, coupled with the cold temperatures, has a way of affecting our outlook on things.

It's not unusual to feel a bit depressed this time of year. As I mentioned at Christmas, I take advantage of every bit of sunlight I can soak in. Winter doldrums or not, all of us battle the blahs every now and then, some more severely and more persistently than others.

In fact, I am of the mind as I've dealt with people over the years that almost everyone deals with a bit of depression to some degree. If we are really honest with ourselves, our circumstances are such that they play havoc with our emotions. That is all the more reason to deal with those emotions.

Wisdom from the Book of Proverbs

Proverbs 15:13 states, "*A happy heart makes the face cheerful, but heartache crushes the spirit.*" We should be careful not to let things get to the place where our spirits are crushed.

Proverbs 17:22 says much the same, "*A cheerful heart is good medicine, but a crushed spirit dries up the bones.*" A crushed spirit keeps us from living life to the full. A cheerful heart is just what the doctor ordered. I'm talking about the Great Physician here.

Proverbs 15:30 states, "*Light in a messenger's eyes brings joy to the heart, and good news gives health to the bones.*" Nothing brightens our spirits like good news. Nothing puts us where we need to be like standing with firm assurance in the good news that is ours in Jesus Christ.

Dealing with Our Emotions

The Psalmist reminds us that we are *“fearfully and wonderfully made.”* (Psalm 119:14) We are also quite complicated, particularly when it comes to our emotions.

As we have come to know, emotions have a way of manifesting themselves in surprising ways. Cheryl and I have a good friend who says that when it comes to emotions, *“Sometimes things just come out sideways.”* I will often say to myself when some emotion comes bubbling out, *“Where did that come from?”* That happens all the time when I am sitting in traffic. How about you?

It comes to us all to look deep within and try and make sense of all the currents that make up our emotions. As you know, that’s easier said than done. It’s not easy taking a hard look at ourselves. It takes a lot of work to figure out what’s going on when it comes to our feelings.

A Spiritual Pursuit

I’m of the mind that dealing with things emotionally is ultimately a spiritual pursuit. One thing for sure, an honest pursuit of God will eventually cause us to look deep within. In God’s light, all things are made known. We see ourselves for who we are.

- Our shortcomings and failures are exposed.
- Our insecurities are laid bare.
- The things of the past are dealt with.

Psalm 139:1-2 talks about God’s great work in this regard. *“O Lord, you have examined my heart and know everything about me. You know when I sit down or stand up. You know my thoughts even when I am far away.”* God is able to search us out like no other. If given a chance, he probes deep within, leading us to respond in ways that bring healing and wholeness.

Hear this prayer from Psalm 139:23-24.

“Search me, O God, and know my heart; test me and know my anxious thoughts. Point out anything in me that offends you and lead me along the path of everlasting life.”

God knows us better than we know ourselves. Jesus himself said, *“the very hairs on your head are numbered.”* (Luke 12:7) We need to let God do his thing when it comes to him *“searching”* us out. We’d all do well to lay ourselves before him.

Heeding the Great Commandments

When it comes to emotional health the Great Commandments of *“loving God”* and *“loving our neighbors as we love ourselves”* stand front and center. When it comes to such things, three things are at play:

- Loving God.
- Loving others.
- And loving ourselves.

Each of these things is a high calling and, quite frankly, beyond us save for the love of God in our lives. It is absolute truth we love only as we have first been loved. Such begins with God and stretches to those who have been and are a part of our lives. God uses others to share his love, including those who make up our families. God's love makes it possible to love well in every area of life. We are not only able to love him, but other people. We are even able to love ourselves.

The stuff of loving ourselves is critical to emotional health. A healthy, mature love for self opens the door to deal with those emotions that aren't so becoming and to live into those that are.

Emotional Intelligence

There is a lot of talk these days about "*Emotional Intelligence*." According to Joshua Freedman in his book *Handle with Care*, "*Emotional Intelligence is a way of recognizing, understanding, and choosing how we think, feel, and act. It shapes our interactions with others and our understanding of ourselves. Emotional Intelligence defines how and what we learn. It allows us to set priorities. It determines the majority of our daily actions.*"

Freedman also asserts that "*research suggests that Emotional Intelligence is responsible for as much as 80% of the "success" in our lives.*"

I ran across a graphic the other day which outlines the various elements that make up "*Emotional Intelligence*." The graphic included five elements:

- **Self-awareness.** Centuries ago, Socrates coined the phrase, "*Know thyself*." The ability to look deep within is critical to emotional health. Looking deep within is not always easy, and in some instances is best done with the help of a trusted counselor.
- **Empathy.** Empathy is a matter of valuing the feelings of others. It is a matter of listening. It involves considering how you would feel in the same situation. Jesus tells us to "*do unto others as we would have them do unto us*." He also says, "*Judge not, let you be judged*."
- **Motivation.** Motivation has less to do with external rewards, and more with fulfilling inner needs and goals. A fire that burns within will always carry us a lot further than some "*carrot on a stick*."
- **Self-Regulation.** Self-regulation has everything to do with processing things before acting. This includes providing space to calm down, get perspective, and act appropriately. As I have mentioned on other occasions, there are just some things I chose to sleep on. I have found that practice helpful over and over again.

- **Social Skills.** Social skills point to the ability to make and maintain right relationships. No one is an island unto themselves. God created us for relationship. We were not built to go it alone. Those who possess the ability to build right relationships will go a long way in this world.

The degree to which we employ these things in our lives will affect the value we add to those around us and the degree to which we experience fulfillment in our lives.

The Level Playing Field of the Church

I have always felt that everyone, and I mean everyone, who walks through the doors of the church, has things they need to deal with. In that sense, we are all on a level playing field.

I feel just as strongly that the church is a place to deal with those things. The church ought to be a common ground where all concerned can come and offer what's going on in their lives, and that in an environment of love, compassion, and trust.

While some of that does go on when it comes to church, sadly, it doesn't go on nearly enough. When it comes to church, sometimes we are all too contented to put on a happy face at the expense of really being authentic. We would much prefer to make a good appearance, even when things aren't as they appear to be.

You might be like Cheryl and me when it comes to cleaning the house in advance of having people over. We straighten, dust, and vacuum, but God forbid our guests open a closet door.

While we may be going on to perfect, none of us are perfect. We need to get over that notion and get real.

A Prescription for Emotional Health

Just like we did last week, let's consider a prescription. This time for emotional health.

- Let me encourage you to name your feelings.
- With God's help and the help of others work to break from whatever destructive patterns you've developed in your life.
- Know your strengths and weaknesses and freely share them with others.
- Work on resolving conflict in a way that takes into consideration the perspective of others. It was the Apostle Paul who said, "*Be angry but do not sin; do not let the sun go down on your anger.*" (Ephesians 4:26)
- Become alert to God's love. Open yourself to God and allow him to fill you to the depth of soul. Remember God is present in all you do.

Laying Down Our Baggage

For those of you who have flown, you know that lugging around a carry-on bag can get a bit bothersome.

We all carry baggage, and that baggage weighs us down to no end. Because of the baggage we carry, we risk missing out on the emotional health God so desires for our lives.

Lay down your baggage at the foot of the cross and let God do with you what he will.