

Preacher: Tim Hollenberg-Duffey

Scripture: Romans 12:2; 3 John 1:2

“There is a story circulating about the patient who went to his physician complaining of pain in several places. The doctor asked him to indicate where it hurt. He pointed first to his leg, then to his back, then to his side, finally to his head. ‘Every time I press on these places, it hurts.’ After a careful examination, the physician diagnosed his problem: ‘You have a broken finger.’”¹

Recently, I sat comfortably in a room with several people I know very well as one of them explained a new ailment they were having and the rest of us asked questions and attempted to diagnose what this ailment could be. It was like playing twenty questions with someone’s health, but this person left the conversation with a wide range of possible diagnoses. You probably play this game too with some frequency. We are preoccupied, it seems, with health talk.

And if you don’t have a group of people to play this odd game with, you can always go to WebMD and they’ll ask a series of questions related to your symptoms before giving you their mountain of potential diagnoses that will worry you to death. Most doctors and nurses, I imagine, would lecture that we stay off of WebMD and probably would suggest not listening to our non-medical friends diagnosing our issues, but we still all do it. Remember just as a side note, when you come to church, you’ve got a couple experts who are always willing to help in our parish nurses.

I’ve found it interesting as I visit with people who are sick or in the hospital that we often find ourselves talking about physical ailments, searching for solutions, or maybe just processing our thoughts aloud so that the person can ask the right questions of the people that might know the answer, but I’m certainly not that person. When we talk about our ailments, we often talk about them as if our bodies are machines that need work done, much like a car. The yearly flu shot becomes like a regular oil change, broken bones are like body work that must be done after an accident, and knee or hip replacements are like replacing transmissions. Some of these physical ailments require only a simple remedy of a medicine or a surgery or time. Much of our health, however, is far more difficult to compare to caring for a vehicle or other machine. God has made these bodies with a grand complexity and intricacy, and God has made these bodies to change over time with various interactions.

As a focal theme for this Health Promotion Sunday, the nurses wanted to focus on the mind. Healthy Mind, Healthy Lives. This human mind remains one of life’s greatest mysteries. It’s one thing to understand the way a muscle and bone interact, but it’s a whole other field to understand what happens in our brains. The brain cannot so easily be compared to some machine that requires a changing of parts or a little oil. No, the brain might best compare to the vastness of the internet, a conglomerate of facts, memories, feelings, anxieties—all pulled to the forefront as we need. The human mind is simply incredible.

So, how do we promote keeping our minds healthy? Well, culturally, we do a lot of things. We promote positive thinking—look on the bright side. We believe in continuing education—always be learning something new. We promote reading over other media consumption. We promote detox time for the brain through days off and vacation. We value sharing time with people who value us and support us. We know that some issues of the mind are so overwhelming that outside help is needed for issues related to anxiety, depression, trauma can be helped through professional counseling and medication. Diseases of the mind must also be

¹https://www.homileticonline.com/subscriber/illustration_search.asp?item_topic_id=1194

handled with professional support—Alzheimer’s and various forms of dementia are not things that caregivers should feel like they need to do alone. Nor should such matters be sources of shame for people.

Health issues of the mind and brain still carry a good bit of taboo in our society from depression to dementia to schizophrenia to personality disorders, but these things shouldn’t cause such grief. Do we squabble over knee replacements or strep throat in the same way? No. So, let’s learn to deal with our healthy minds openly and supportively for one another. And I believe our faith has a role to play in this process

I am intrigued by the guide that scripture provides us as far as promoting a healthy mind. The Sabbath gift, I believe, is most obvious to me. The mind needs a break from the high intensity work that happens the other days of the week. This is a day to rest your physical body but maybe more importantly the mind. Sit challenging matters aside and think on something else, something holy.

The other gift in scripture that comes to mind is a recurring theme in the letter of Paul that brothers and sister in the church ought to encourage one another to build one another up. Ephesians 4:29 says, “Let no unwholesome word proceed from your mouth, but only such a word as is good for edification according to the need of the moment, so that it will give grace to those who hear.” The job of the community of believers is edification, building up. That’s not to say that there isn’t a time for challenging one another, but challenge comes only because we want and expect growth out of us all—and we challenge in love.

So, do find time to rest your mind and be with people who edify you, and work at edifying them too.

One of the texts for this morning is probably very familiar. Romans 12:2 says, “Do not conform to the pattern of this world but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God’s will is—his good, pleasing and perfect will.” In this text, Paul is suggesting that the renewing of your mind is necessary in understanding God’s will for our lives. Let’s unpack this scripture a little.

First, “Do not be conformed to the patterns of this world.” This opening phrase has been an important one for Brethren since our founding. You are not to look like those in the world. At one point in time, this meant keep your beard in a certain way and dress in plain clothes and don’t drive a car. Today it could mean different things— don’t get too caught up in the hoopla of political discourse; be the person who sits with the stranger; go out of your way for someone in need. The assumption is the patterns of this world are not in the end good for your mind.

Rather, what is good for your mind is “being transformed by the renewing of your mind.” Transformation and renewal—both words have to do with change, with trying something new or different, with pushing yourself to understand something difficult. Transformation and renewal do not come through the repetition of the same, but rather a push to go deeper. If you continually read the same scripture assuming you already know what it means, then transformation will not come; but if you read that same scripture with an attitude that God might teach you something new, then transformation might happen. Our minds like change; they crave the new. Feed your mind by allowing it to engage God in fresh ways.

If you do this, then Romans 12:2 finishes by saying, “Then you will be able to test and approve what God’s will is—his good, pleasing and perfect will.” Understanding God’s will for your life is dependent on your willingness to change, to renew. So, in a sense, if a healthy life depends on following God’s will, God’s good and perfect will, then understanding God’s will

comes down to your willingness to change and transform, and thus puts an awful lot of pressure on your healthy mind.

A healthy mind is one that allows for transformation, but the natural human tendency is to resist transformation and keep things the same. Well, sorry folks, the Gospel is change, the world is change. As soon as Jesus shows up on the scene in Mark's Gospel he says, "Repent and believe the Good News." Repent, of course, means to change, to redirect your path, and in this case believe in something new. The nature of the Good News is that it will be different than what you are taught in the world. So, you might need to change and redirect and repent of that which you thought your mind knew about life. Jesus' intent for our living is going to be different.

Understanding Jesus' intent for our living might just depend on your healthy mind, so keep it well, and pursue healing when needed.