

Meditation

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(This meditation was presented by Dr. Tregaskis, chairman of FaithNet NY at the NAMI NY State Conference on 10/31/04)

In the little known book of Zephaniah, one of the minor prophets of the Old Testament, we read:

The Lord your God is with you,

He is mighty to save.

He will take great delight in you,

He will quiet you with his love.

He will rejoice over you with singing.

This verse has a message for three groups of people:

1. Those living with mental illness and who feel they are alone in their struggles
2. Those with mental illness who have realized a measure of recovery and
3. Those who are caregivers for someone with mental illness.

To those living with mental illness, I want you to hear these great and inspiring words from Zephaniah – *The Lord your God is with you, he is mighty to save.*

I know that some of you do not realize the truth of these words, cannot sense that God is with you simply because your thoughts are clouded by depression, bipolar disorder, borderline personality disorder, schizophrenia or any of the hosts of other no-fault brain disorders. These words are meant to change that – to bring hope and the presence of God into your life.

I know that you sometimes have difficulty understanding the storm that rages about you; sometimes have difficulty clearly hearing the voice of God among competing voices; sometimes have difficulty focusing on the sermon of the day; sometimes find it impossible to spend time alone in meditation and prayer; sometimes find that warm relationships with other people and yes, even with God are elusive. And at times you have reason to question if God has deserted you.

If you are someone with a mental illness and you are not receiving treatment you need to know that treatment is available and is effective. And you need the assurance given to us by the prophet Zephaniah that the Lord thy God is with you – you are not going through this alone. And that he is mighty to save – yes even to save you from the frightening darkness and helpless feelings that are caused by a malfunctioning mind.

If you are someone who is somewhere on your journey of recovery from a mental illness you also need to hear from Zephaniah that the Lord takes great delight in you. You've hung in there, you have accepted as gifts from God what modern medicine has to offer to you; you've been faithful in taking your meds; you've showed up for therapy, you've taken constructive steps. You have doggedly held to the belief that more promising times were possible. You're making it. To you, the Lord says "Well done good and faithful servant. I take great delight in your determination and faith."

If you are a family member of someone with a mental illness and have experienced the disruptive impact that mental illness has on all members of the family, you need to hear Zephaniah's words: He, the Lord your God, will quiet you with his love. In the words of Christ: My peace I give unto you, not as the world gives give I unto you. He quiets us with his love.

But what do we make of this final promise and picture of God given to us by Zephaniah? He rejoices over us with singing. How can we relate to that at the moment we say goodbye to a son or daughter we have to leave behind the locked door of a psychiatric ward? He rejoices?

What meaning does this have to us when a relapse of depression suffocates us in despair? He rejoices?

What comfort is there in this promise when our bipolar spouse is out of control and spending without limit? He rejoices?

Does the picture of a God rejoicing over us with singing soften the pain of friends forsaking us because of the stigma attached to mental illnesses?

This is my interpretation of this verse. Words set to music, or song, can be very moving, can be a means of expressing deep desires. The God I see in this verse is one reaching out to all of us - whether consumers or family members - in one of the most effective means of communication – song -- and making an emotional appeal for us to come to him, to have confidence in him, to lay all that we fail to understand at his feet. It is a God wooing us to Himself by song.

In the words of Isaiah the prophet: Give ear and come to me; hear me that your soul may live. And in the words of Christ: Come to me all you who are weary and burdened and I will give you rest. Yes, he rejoices over us with song.

In closing let me paraphrase and embellish the 17th verse of the 3rd chapter of Zephaniah:

Yes, Yes, you who are living with mental illness I the Lord am with you. My presence does not depend on your state of mind which I know you may have difficulty controlling. I am with you because I want to be. So I will be. Count on it. I am mighty to save. To save you from becoming so discouraged that you lose sight of the possibility of recovery through the miracles of modern medicine. It's all not modern to me. I have created all things – both the miracle anti-psychotics that are giving you a measure of relief today and the even more promising pharmacology that will be available tomorrow. I have created all things; some have just taken longer than others to be discovered.

I am mighty to save you from your illness over which you have no control and for which you bear no fault.

For those of you who have persevered, and taken the necessary steps to recovery, I'm delighted by your faith and determination. You have proven to be my Noah, my Abraham, my Moses, my Joshua, my Job, my Daniel and indeed the reflection of my son, Emmanuel who endured the cross for the crown that was set before him.

All experienced tough and seemingly impossible times and they persevered. And their faith was rewarded. So too, you who I care so much about, I shall honor your faith in me.

And those whom I quiet with my love; those who have been my angels ministering to my ill children so patiently through so many dark nights, all the while needing a balm for your own worried self, look what it is that brings calm: My love. Yes, let me quiet you with my love.

And do I sing over you – all of you consumers and family members -- with rejoicing? Do I court you with my song? Do you hear me calling you to come to me for comfort? I trust so for it is only by a relationship with me that you will find the wholeness you seek. Why else would I have said: You shall, yes by a relationship to me you shall be empowered, to love the Lord thy God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your sound, able and healthy mind.

I trust you have a relationship with this God of hope and promise.