



Lesson 1 – Valued

This week we are looking at one of the best known stories in the gospels to see how Jesus reacts to someone who is stigmatised by his community.

Read Luke 19:1-10

- Why doesn't Zacchaeus fit into his community?
- What is Jesus' response?
- Can you think of a time when you felt like you didn't fit in, or felt like an outsider? What happened? Did things change? How?

Jesus values Zacchaeus in a way that the community has not, and he gives Zacchaeus ways of re-thinking his value to the community. These are all ways we can think about moving from stigmatising to valuing people.

Question: What is mental health?

The World Health Organisation says that mental health can be defined as a state of well-being in which every individual realises his or her own potential, can cope with the normal stresses of life, can work productively and fruitfully, and is able to make a contribution to her or his community. Mental health affects how we think and feel about ourselves and others, how we interpret events, how we learn, how we cope with life events and how we develop and sustain relationships.

One in four people experience a mental health problem at some point in their lifetime. This is as true for those in the church as anyone else.

Every single one of us participates in the daily activity of balancing life's stresses with the emotional resources available to us. We will usually do

this unconsciously, in the same way that our bodies prompt us to replace energy lost through physical activity. We all have emotional health issues, just as we have physical health issues. Some people are largely able to take their wellbeing for granted; others will need to make particular efforts to stay well; still others may need to receive much more comprehensive care to live a full life. Whilst society has become increasingly conscious of promoting investment in physical wellbeing through diet and exercise, far less has been done to encourage investment into emotional and mental wellbeing.

25% of adults will suffer from a diagnosable mental health condition at some point in their life – mental health concerns are not a minority issue – they affect humanity in general. As Christians, we are motivated to care not just for those who are currently suffering from mental illness, but to see unity in the body as a whole.

Paul reflects this unity in 1 Corinthians 12:26 when he says: ‘If one member suffers, all suffer together; if one member is honoured, all rejoice together.’

The Bible says that the fruit of the Spirit includes joy and peace, so some might say that true Christians should not suffer from mental health problems. What do you think?

Being a Christian does not make a person immune to mental health problems. There are all kinds of causes of mental health problems, which we will look at in more detail next week. Just like physical injuries and diseases, mental health problems can affect anyone. But having poor mental health does not mean that God cannot use you.

In fact, a number of Bible heroes may today be described as mentally unwell. A list may include the writer of many Psalms, prophets like

Ezekiel and Jeremiah, not forgetting Jonah and Elijah who both prayed for death because they didn't feel they could go on. Each one was used powerfully by God despite their mental health challenges!

- How can our church remove some of the stigma of mental health?
- How can we value people, especially people who may feel like they don't fit in?

Meditation Take a few minutes of quiet to review what we've heard today and think about what to do with it, giving God the space to speak to us. Sit comfortably and close your eyes.

- ***Think of a time when you felt left out – stigmatised, different for whatever reason.*** What was going on? - How did you feel?

- ***Now think of a time when you felt valued.*** What happened? - How did you feel?

Is there anyone you know who is struggling to feel valued and included in your church or community? How do you think Jesus feels about them?

- What can you do to make a difference?

Closing prayer Lord of the excluded, Open my eyes to those I would prefer not to see. Open my life to those I would prefer not to know. Open my heart to those I would prefer not to love. And so open my eyes to see where I exclude.