

INCLUSION
AND
EMBRACE



“For many disabled persons, the church has been a “city on a hill” ---physically inaccessible and socially inhospitable...Sadly, rather than offering empowerment, the church has more often supported societal structures and attitudes that have treated people with disabilities as objects of pity and paternalism. The primary problem for the church is not how to “accommodate” disabled persons. The problem is a disabling theology that functionally denies inclusion and justice for many of God’s children.”—Nancy Eiesland, *Encountering the Disabled God*



PROBLEMS OF INTERPRETATION

Scripture that combines disability with impurity...the "holiness code" in Leviticus. Banished disabled people for fear of being unclean.

New Testament stories that equate sin with disability. Who sinned?

Misunderstood illness such as seizures, autism, or mental illness.

**OTHER
REASONS / LIES
ABOUT
DISABILITIES**



“We just need to pray over you and ask God to take this away.”

“If you tried hard enough, you could overcome this!”

“You are special in God’s eyes, that’s why you were given this painful disability.”

“When you get to heaven, you will be made whole!”

THE DISABLED GOD

In Luke 24, Jesus appeared to the disciples following the resurrection and says to them ***“Why are you frightened, and why do doubts arise in your hearts? Look at my hands and my feet; see that it is I, myself. Touch me and see.”***

“This was the resurrected Christ making good on the promise that God would be with us, embodied, as we are-disabled and divine. Jesus Christ, as a living symbol of the disabled God, shares in the human condition. He enters the arena of human limitations, even helplessness. Jesus’ own body is wounded and scarred, disfigured and distorted.”

---Nancy Eiesland, *Encountering the Disabled God*

Disability can include suffering, a blessing, or somewhere in between.

In heaven, perhaps we should not expect an end to disability *per se*, but pain and limitations around disability.

“I don’t suffer because of my deafness, I suffer because of the lack of awareness and overt audism on display by hearing society...and, no, I wouldn’t change who I am: It’s an integral part of my identity.”— Sam Seaver

Many people with autism are proud of their neuro-divergent brains, others hate it.

WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO BE INCLUSIVE

“An inclusive ministry is one which enables, empowers and engages all persons within the worshipping community, regardless of ability. This stems from a belief that God has created us as equally-valued people in His image. “Let us create man in OUR Image” (Gen 1:26). The image of God is best reflected *in community*. Together we live out the mandate of Luke 4:18-21, proclaiming “the year of the Lord’s favour” to everyone.”

--Erik Carter, Professor, Dept. of Special Education,
Vanderbilt



INCLUSIVE IS NOT...

An inclusive ministry is not a program. It is not about creating a special class or a separate ministry or even identifying ‘the disabled’ as an object of ministry. It may be summarized in the motto “**ministry *by* and *with* people with disabilities,**” in contrast to ministry *for* people with disabilities. It is opening the doors of the Church to include those with disabilities to fully participate in the life of the Body of Christ.



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EVERYDAY LIVES
GUIDES US IN OUR
COMMITMENT TO
HELP CREATE A
WORLD THAT
EMBRACES AND
CELEBRATES
HUMAN
DIFFERENCES, A
WORLD IN WHICH
EVERYONE CAN
EXPERIENCE
BELONGING

In 1974, the state began to move people with disabilities out of institutions and into group (residential) homes. They began a program called *Everyday Lives*.

As we near the 30th anniversary of the adoption of Everyday Lives, the words of John McKnight included in the first Everyday Lives publication hold true: ***“Our goal should be clear. We are seeking nothing less than a life surrounded by the richness and diversity of community. A collective life. A common life. An everyday life. A powerful life that gains its joy from the creativity and connectedness that comes when we join in association as citizens to create an inclusive world.”***



We all have a gift to bring.

WHO IS MISSING FROM THE TABLE?



1. Who are we in the parable?
2. What groups meet at the church?
3. Do we reach out to them or just provide them space?
4. If they meet here, they must be part of the community. Where are they? Do we even notice them?
5. Would they be comfortable in our worship service? (Are we too stuffy?)
6. What might we need to change/add, or do differently?