



Strength made perfect
Disability and the church

Session 5: Disability and today's church

Participant's handout

Welcome and time to reflect on the last session.

This week we will be thinking about the church today and why it is that disabled people find themselves disadvantaged and marginalised.

Finding grace

Listen to the recording of this section or read the text in the leader's guide

Now this is our boast: Our conscience testifies that we have conducted ourselves in the world, and especially in our relations with you, in the holiness and sincerity that are from God. We have done so not according to worldly wisdom but according to God's grace.

2 Cor 1:12

Questions

1. Do you recognise the economy of exchange in the society in which you live? If you can, what can you identify that tells you this? If you are disabled, can you share your experience of living with your disability within this secular economy of exchange?
2. Do you think your church is operating in the economy of exchange or the economy of grace? What signs do you see or experiences have you had that influence your opinion?
3. What about you personally? Can you identify ways in which you make judgements and ascribe greater or lesser value to people because of their personal qualities and attributes?

Commodity or community?

Listen to the recording of this section or read the text in the leader's guide

"My prayer is not for them alone. I pray also for those who will believe in me through their message, that all of them may be one, Father, just as you are in me and I am in you. May they also be in us so that the world may believe that you have sent me. I have given them the glory that you gave me, that they may be one as we are one: I in them and you in me. May they be brought to complete unity to let the world know that you sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me.

John 17:20-23

Questions

1. How does all this make you feel? Do you think a radical reimagining of what the church is in the light of 'my ability is made perfect in your disability' could be transformative?
2. What do you think is at the centre of your church? A striving for power or an acceptance of weakness?
3. What do you think your church could do to bring disability and disabled people into the centre and model the radical economy of grace in your parish?

Time to reflect

A voice from the margins

Two thousand years ago a young pregnant teenage girl uttered the words that sparked the coming of the Kingdom of God. This was Mary, pregnant after the annunciation, living on the edge, disgraced, frightened. In danger of being rejected by her husband to be and ostracised by her family. As a woman, she was already on the edge of society. As a pregnant unmarried teenager, she is slipping out of the area of normalcy and acceptability.

And yet it is from here that she proclaims the kingdom that is coming. The kingdom she knew would be fulfilled through the child she is carrying.

Read these words spoken from the margins. Spoken by the excluded and marginalised, and let Mary's vision of the kingdom come alive in you today.

My soul glorifies the Lord
and my spirit rejoices in God my Saviour,
for he has been mindful of the humble state of his servant. From now on all generations will
call me blessed,
for the Mighty One has done great things for me —
holy is his name.
His mercy extends to those who fear him,
from generation to generation.
He has performed mighty deeds with his arm;
he has scattered those who are proud in their inmost thoughts.
He has brought down rulers from their thrones
but has lifted up the humble.
He has filled the hungry with good things
but has sent the rich away empty.
He has helped his servant Israel, remembering to be merciful
to Abraham and his descendants for ever,
even as he said to our fathers."

This first whisper that the kingdom long-promised is here, is uttered by a weak and
vulnerable girl from a place of marginalisation and isolation. What kingdom truths are in the
mouths of the marginalised and disregarded today? And are we ready to hear what they
have to say?

Spend some time in silence reflecting on this.

Share your thoughts.

Prayer