



Strength made perfect
Disability and the church

Session 6: An inclusive church

Participant's handout

Welcome and time to reflect on the last session.

In this final session we will be imagining a model of church and community that might enable us to be the truly united and inclusive church that we are called to be.

The Limits Model.

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

'The limits model challenges the deficit model, suggesting that disability is not something that exists solely as a negative experience of limitation but rather that it is an intrinsic, unsurprising, and valuable element of human limit-ness..... A limits perspective, rather than leading us toward fragmentation or universality, can instead offer a common ground for conversation and become a productive datum for theological reflection.'

(Deborah Creamer, Disability and Christian theology, P96)

Questions

1. In what ways are you limited and what do you think about your limitations? We often think it is our gifts that bring sacred potential into our lives and to the church. What do you think of the idea that your limits could also offer sacred potential?
2. Has there ever been a time when a limitation you experience has sparked an encounter or relationship that has been unexpectedly fruitful? If you are disabled, can you remember a time when your disability has been the catalyst for an encounter when God has been revealed?
3. What difference do you think it would make in your church and/or in society if people were willing to own and share their limits and limitations and allow them to be places of social and sacred encounter?

The limitness paradigm

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

'Your limitness is the shape of your life, and if you are going to realise the full sacred potential that God has blessed you with, you need to learn to fully inhabit your limitness. That means that each of us need to learn how to live at our limits rather than living our lives only in our comfortable centre. Disability means that people have to live at their limits for much of their lives. Their disability, their limit, is an ever present experience that they cannot escape from. The thing is though that our limits are the place of divine sacred encounter, not just for disabled people but for all of us. It is when we walk at our limits, when we inhabit and expose our limits to each other that we find the sparks of God begin to fly. It is our limits, or the interfaces and interactions between each of our limitness shapes, that creates the ground and potential for divine sacred encounter.'

Questions

1. Can you relate to your life being an experience of 'limitness'? Do you think your limitations could be a catalyst for God to be revealed in you and others?
2. Has there ever been a time when you have been vulnerable but found that this was an opportunity for the work of God to be displayed in your life and the world? If you are disabled, has your disability brought about encounters in which you have felt the presence of God?
3. What do you think a church built on the paradigm of limitness might be like?

If these sessions have inspired you to want to explore more aspects of accessibility and inclusion, you might like to look at the Diocese of London Disability Ministry webpage for more resources to help you explore what this might mean for you and your church.

Conclusion

These six sessions have been an introduction to thinking about disability and the church. They are not an end in themselves but only have any worth if they have sparked in you an impulse to discover more. They have only been of any worth if they have left you knowing that it is time for the church to both reflect and change the way in which disabled people belong to and participate in the life and worship of the church.

For too long disabled people have been marginalised and viewed as needy by the church. Their prophetic call and witness to the radical, counter-cultural kingdom that is founded in the economy of grace has been ignored. For too long the church has run after power and status and influence rather than recognising that weakness is the route to real power. The power of God that is made perfect in our weakness. For too long the church has been

buying into the secular economy of exchange and mirroring the cult of normalcy that rejects so many people.

The paradigm of limitness creates a framework to counter all of this. It demolishes the dualism that is at the heart of the economy of exchange and the cult of normalcy. It has the potential to be the foundation of a truly counter-cultural church that brings the Kingdom of God alive afresh for this generation.

Some words of blessing

May the God who gives endurance and encouragement give you a spirit of unity among yourselves as you follow Christ Jesus, so that with one heart and mouth you may glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. Accept one another, then, just as Christ accepted you, in order to bring praise to God.

Romans 15:5-7

Share the standout thoughts and ideas you will take away from these sessions.

What will you do with them?

Pray