

***Troubled Minds***

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Dr. Angela Glading

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[Music Intro]

[Male voice] The following is a presentation of Artisan Church in Rochester, New York.

[Voice of Pastor Scott]

As I mentioned at the beginning of our service, we have a member of our leadership team who will be giving our sermon today and this is Angela Glading, Dr Glading as she's known in academic circles. I'm so grateful to Angela for her heart and for her mind and for her desire to share with all of you today. And it's probably a good thing, to be honest with you, because after my trip this past week to our denominational clergy conference I have like a million things I want to share with you! And we also did that "stump the pastor" thing last week and do you ever have those occasions where like, after you leave a conversation you're like "oh I should have said this or that" and I have about sixteen of those that I want to share with you today so if I were to have tried to give a sermon today it would have been the most rambling ramble that ever rambled! And so we knew long ago with the travel week that it would be good to have somebody else preaching today and Angela has been working hard on this for a very long time. And I think it's going to be very important and powerful message for all of us and for some of us in particular. And so, thank you to Angela, and I'd like to pray for Angela and then you can all welcome her, OK?

Gracious God I give you thanks for this incredible woman of faith, this wonderful leader of our church, and for the message that you've placed on her heart and I pray for each of us as we listen that we would hear from your spirit in these thoughts and these words and that we would grow closer to each other and to you and increase in our awareness of ourselves and of who God is. So give her passion and power in her words and give us ears to hear and hearts to listen. We pray in Christ's name. Amen.

So would you join me in welcoming Angela?

[Angela]

Thank you. So, to start off I'm super excited. I'm super nervous. Which is not really like me but... And I wanted to give a caveat that I'm not the most diplomatic of speakers normally and today

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we're talking about mental illness in the church and I know that this is a sensitive subject and I wanted to apologize in advance because I will inevitably put my foot in my mouth, but it's not my intention to be hurtful in any way and if I do, please let me know and I will do what I can to make it right.

So, many of you know me pretty well but I know lots of you don't know me very well. You know who I am, you know that I'm on leadership team, so I thought that I would start by introducing myself. So, as Scott said, I'm a professor at the UofR, I'm a scientist. I'm a dog mom - I have two for kids that I spoil rotten. I'm the wife of a truly amazing man, Dan, whose face you've seen way too many times already. In my spare time, what little of it there is, I like to make things, do crafts, sewing, different kinds of stuff. I'm a Virgo. On Myers Briggs I'm an INTP which might tell you some things. For my Enneagram nerds out there, I'm a five. I'm from California originally, we moved out here about nine years ago. I have two sisters. And I suffer from depression. And it got quiet really quick. And I don't know if any of you are surprised, I mean you have probably seen me laughing and joking around with my friends, but this is a confession that I feel I need to make to you. And it really is a confession, because it's not something that you normally talk about in casual conversation. In fact most of us, and by us I mean the estimated quarter of people who will be affected by mental illness this year alone, we don't tell anyone, normally. Twenty five percent, that's a lot of people, and you think that's one out of four so, you are starting to look around, somebody in *my* row, although it's not too full today, but, you know. And then the people who are like "oh my god that's me! Is anybody going to guess, that's me!?" Because we're terrified, we're all terrified of not feeling or looking whole to others, we're terrified that people are going to find out that we don't have it all put together. That's true for everybody, whether they're affected with mental illness or not, but for the mentally ill we've got bigger hurdles to overcome. And so today I'm going to talk about some of those hurdles and share a little bit about my personal faith journey, but I wanted to start out by talking about why people who suffer from mental illness don't like to talk about it.

So, one of the reasons is because we are afraid that mental illness, that our illness, our suffering, is not going to be considered to be real. My father was an artist, he taught art in high school for thirty five years and for most of my young life his behavior was chalked up as an artistic temperament as just, you know, a thing that artists do and it wasn't until he had a nervous breakdown and was hospitalized when I was eleven, that friends and family realized that this was something more serious than just him being melodramatic.

We also feel worthless. We feel worthless because people tell us, "just get your act together! Just get over it" You know, "if something bad happened to you, give it to God!" Mental illness isn't something that we get over and the fact that we're told over and over again that we need

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to, that we should just change, makes us feel ashamed. People with mental illness feel alone and isolated because we don't talk about it. And because we feel that this is our problem, that there's something fundamentally wrong with us. We don't talk about it because we know you won't understand what it's like. And it's exhausting to try to communicate what depression or bipolar disorder feels like.

We don't want to burden people with our pain - this is a big one for me. My husband and I've been married for twenty years, and the first ten years there were good times, but bad times too. And I realized that it was important that he know what's going on with me so we developed a code. So when I'm feeling hopeless and out of control I tell my husband that I'm having a hard time and then he knows that there's something going on that doesn't have anything to do with him, doesn't have anything to do with, you know, life circumstances. But I also don't have to go into the horrible nitty gritty details of my feelings. And that's really actually helped a lot to know that he is there for me and he's also stopped trying to fix it. But as Scott says that's probably something for another sermon.

The mentally ill don't talk about it because to do so would mean that we're accepting this new definition of our life. This is particularly true for people who are just newly experiencing mental illness. It's a new reality and we want the old reality. We don't want to accept that this is part of who we are.

And finally we're terrified of judgment. We're terrified of baring this thing about our ourselves to a friend or family member or even a random stranger, which sometimes feel safer. And seeing that wall go up behind their eyes as they other us, as they think "oh my gosh this person's going to go crazy! How am I going to get away from this person?" And we've all experienced that and it's heartbreaking. And we feel these things because we have a huge stigma in our society -- this is what our culture teaches. You know we still tell stories about our crazy uncle who takes his pants off after Thanksgiving dinner and we laugh about the crazy cat ladies who just can't release their pets because they are emotionally attached to them. And we label those who commit violent crimes as mentally disturbed, as if violence alone was an indication of mental illness. And so maybe we shouldn't be surprised that those who are mentally ill don't want to talk about it.

And the Church, a place where we should feel safe, Church with a capital C place where we should feel safe, where we should feel welcomed, you know, sometimes they make it even worse. Because in churches around the country we're taught that health and happiness are tangible indicators of God's favor and if you're not happy, if you're not healthy, obviously you're doing something wrong. Some churches believe strongly that mental illness is a manifestation

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of unconfessed sin, others believe it's a sign of demonic possession. Many churches you'll find the unspoken assumption that the affliction of mental illness is because you did something to deserve it, completely ignoring the lessons of Job. And in many places the mentally ill are told, especially the severely mentally ill are told, go get yourself straightened out, stay on your medicine, act normal. Then you can come to church with us and we'll accept you in our community, but until you do, I'm sorry we can't have you here, you're not a safe person. And even churches with a welcoming, affirming stance towards the mentally ill have a hard time ministering to them. And this is because they lack the patience. Because mental illness is a life-long event -- a life long chain of suffering -- and there can be good ups, downs, people can find medications or therapists that make life tolerable or even good. But churches say, "oh we prayed for them, and yet they're not better." "We pray for them again and again and again and I'm over it. Whatever's going on with them they need to fix it. I am done."

With mental illness there is no magic wand, there's no "all better", or at least not necessarily all the time. When I was preparing for this sermon I read a lot of books. And you might recognize the title of this one it's called "Troubled Minds". (I'm not very good at coming up with inventive titles.) I would highly recommend this book, although it's written by someone who's not directly affected with mental illness, but she has mental illness in her family. And what the authors of this book did a survey of five hundred pastors and church leaders and one of the questions they asked is: How often do you talk about mental illness in your church, specifically from the pulpit or stage or whatever you have? Thirty percent said they never talk about it. And the average of those five hundred churches was once a year. So, despite the fact that I think we all would say yes, this is an issue, twenty five percent is a big number, twenty five percent is more than people affected with heart disease, diabetes, and cancer combined, but we're not doing anything about it. So, the reasons why are complicated.

Christians in particular have a difficult time with mental illness because theologically, this is a weird one. How we understand the mind and the soul now is very different to how they understood the mind and the soul in biblical times. And so there's not some easy verse that we can point to to tell us what to do or how to treat people who are mentally ill. And there's a lot of reading into passages in the New Testament where Jesus heals people: "oh that person was actually mentally ill, or..." But we don't know for sure. And obviously, I mean I'm a scientist, I'm not a theologian, so I'm not a scientist of that kind, let's put it that way. But as a scientist I understand and I accept personally that we don't understand where the mind ends and the soul begins and I don't even know if we can accept that those are two different things. They might be the same thing. But putting that aside, even if we do accept that mental illness has a physical origin, it's a chemical imbalance, which I do, it's a disease, just like diabetes, we still have to deal somehow as Christians with the pain that it causes. And so if anyone was here for second

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service last week for “Stump the Pastor”, you got a sneak preview of how “naughty” a theological question pain and suffering is. And so I'm not going to solve it. I'm not even sure of all my feelings about God and pain and suffering, but I do know some things that I've come to understand over the twenty plus years of dealing with my own personal depression and I'd like to share those with you.

When I was fourteen my dad took me to the doctor because he thought I was sleeping too much. My doctor screened me from mononucleosis, which as a teenager was the normal thing to do and I was negative so he decided, well she's still growing. She'll get over it. And that was the end of it. Looking back I know that that was the beginning of my depression, my clinical depression. I knew that the normal teenage drama of who likes me and who was friends with who was really threatening to engulf me. It was just so much pressure that I didn't want to deal with it, and so I spent time in bed not sleeping, but just retreating into my own mind, telling myself stories about a life that didn't exist, but in which all my problems were solved, and the right guy liked me and I was friends and I poured mud on cheerleaders, you know all those kinds of wonderful things you think as a teenager. But you know I learned how to put on a good act, you know, in school: straight A student; church: went to church every week with my parents; didn't act out, like you know, didn't sneak out of the house and go drinking, which is what I considered acting out. So nobody knew what was going on inside my head. Sometimes, you know, I went to church, sometimes I prayed that whatever was wrong with me would stop, because something was off, and I could tell. But faith was never really a big part of how I dealt with my own personal issues. And then one night a kid in my youth group was subjected to an exorcism because his parents were divorcing and he had start started smoking pot. And I watched. I still feel guilt that I didn't do anything. I was terrified, he was terrified. It was so fake and hypocritical that I was done with church.

And I went to college and things got worse. I can't count the number of times I tried to strike a bargain with God. “God give me enough energy to go to calculus and I'll become a missionary.” How many times I thought about what it would be like to just be gone, to magically erase myself from this world. How many times did I do something really stupid in order to just feel something else whether it was more self loathing or drunken euphoria. I don't know how many times I silently screamed, “God please help me, I am out of control!” I felt like my blood was on fire and then it was pouring into this huge black pit that was bored through my chest, I could still feel it if I think about it, but just an empty hole of pain.

I don't know how many times I begged God to take this pain away. And I never heard an answer. Never felt relief, never experienced magical healing. My grades clearly showed I never went to calculus. Somehow over these years of bargaining with God, begging him, sometimes

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cursing the fact that he wasn't there, I never lost faith God exists and I don't understand that, that's not rational to me, but it's true. And in retrospect, you know, now as an adult, well older person, I believe He was there, because I can see times that I was comforted. Pain was never taken away, but I was comforted, eventually, sometimes in the strangest ways. When I was fifteen, a guy that I liked in high school told me one day that I looked majestic, which is still the oddest compliment I have ever received, but it was so important to me, because I felt like anything but a Queen.

I eventually accepted that depression is a part of me. I've been to good therapists, I've been to bad therapists, I've been on and off medications, I found one that works for me, I've been through the whole gamut. God was there because he gave me a wonderful man to marry. And mental illness affects the families just as much as it affects those who are actually suffering. And my husband has put up with a lot, more than he should have had to. And eventually I found comfort in the fact that nowhere in the New Testament, in the "Jesus books", which are the ones that we like to look to, does it suggest that the love of Christ is equivalent to the absence of suffering. In fact quite the opposite. To follow Christ through the pain is the road of the disciple. And so somehow this faith that God exists moved me through the pain into knowing God's presence. The pain is still there sometimes, sometimes it blocks out everything, but I can still look for glimpses of God and I do, I look for it now.

Several years ago, here at Artisan, in fact, I felt like doo-doo, crap. I found myself feeling like salt that had lost its flavor, no longer good for anything but to be trampled underfoot, and so somehow that day I was not paying attention to the message, no offense. I found myself at Matthew 16:24, which is page 798. Let me read that for you.

"Then Jesus told His disciples, if any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me."

That's kind of been my mantra for the last several years. Now mental illness is only one of my crosses, but I'm learning how to carry this burden. In her book, "Blessed Are the Crazy", which is a little bit interesting, Sarah Griffith Lund writes something -- that is just Yes! High five several exclamation points, yes! -- she writes "I used to think it was a curse, a sick punishment from God," (it being mental illness), "but what if crosses exist, just like mental illness exists? By bearing the Cross of mental illness and carrying it, not rejecting or denying it, we can move it to a place of transformation just like Christ did on his cross." And that's what I'm trying to do. Every day is carry it someplace new.

So I want to close with just talking a little bit about what we as individuals and as a church can do to support those with mental illness in our community. First thing is we can get educated,

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learn about mental illness, what it is and what it's not. Actually the mentally ill are four times less likely to be involved with violence than normals. We can practice patience with people who are going to be living with us for the rest of their life, walk with them on this long road. We can listen. We can let them know that they're not alone, which is sort of the whole point of me being up here today. You can let them know that you're going to love them just as much after they tell you that they're broken, after they admit to you that they're not OK. And you can remind them that we are all children of God.

So to close, I would like to read from Romans chapter 8, which is on page 919, if you would like to read along. Romans chapter 8, starting at verse 15. "For you did not receive a spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, but you have received the spirit of adoption. When we cry "Abba, Father" it is that very spirit bearing witness with our spirit that we are children of God, and if children then heirs, heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ, if in fact we suffer with him so that we may also be glorified with him. I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory about to be revealed to us."

So I'd like to invite you to come up for communion. Before that I would like to say that we do have a support group on Facebook for those in our community who suffer, it's a confidential, private group so if any of you who interested in joining, please come see me and I will add you to the list of members. I think it's been going on for about a year, slowly building, but we would really welcome anyone who's hurting or maybe wants to offer support to others to join. OK, so now I would like to invite you to communion. To take part in a supper, let our Father feed us. You might notice that there are some grey hearts on the communion table, and if you feel led, I would welcome you to pick up a heart, maybe you can tear it, crumple it up to represent the pain that you are suffering or that a loved one suffers. And then put it in the bowl in the center to show us all that we're not alone.

Let us pray. Dear Lord thank you so much for this wonderful community of loving people. You tell us to bind up the brokenhearted, to mourn with those who mourn, we wish to follow you in this way. Let those who are hurting and suffering know that we love them, that you love them, and that though we may not be able to wipe away the pain that they are not alone, for you are with us. In your name we pray. Amen.

[end of sermon]

[Male voice] For more information visit us at [ArtisanChurch.com](http://ArtisanChurch.com)