



Hallowed be thy name

We look at the significance of being named both in the context of the Exodus story and mental health

Naming mental health conditions can be significant. It is an important part of the diagnosis process, but such labelling can be problematic. Terms can consume someone's identity; you might *have* the flu, but you *are* depressed. Such medical terms certainly have there limits. Identity can become skewed for those with mental health challenges.

Helen Thorne writes in Mental Health and Your Church: "A diagnosis provides a label that we can use to name an experience—and that is a valuable thing to do—but understanding the causes of that experience and how it might be treated are a completely different matter. In that sense psychiatric diagnoses are different to most other medical diagnoses. When a doctor says you have chicken pox or Type 1 diabetes, that diagnosis provides an explanation... But when a doctor says you have OCD (obsessive-compulsive disorder) or anorexia nervosa or bipolar disorder, what you have is a descriptive label. You can describe what is happening but not why. That is a key difference in almost all psychiatric diagnoses."

We have to be responsible when naming things.

Naming people is an important part of being known in Scripture. Indeed, it is of particular significance in Exodus. To be deprived of a name is to strip someone of their identity. It is telling that Pharaoh remains nameless in the Book of Exodus and is known simply by his title, whilst the midwives in Chapter 1 are named: Shiphrah and Puah,

The abbreviated Hebrew title for the Book of Exodus is 'Names'.

During our reading from the third chapter of Exodus, Moses is eager to know God's name so he can tell the Israelites if asked. God's response is the wonderfully elliptical 'Ehyeh-Asher-Ehyeh', which is

perhaps best translated as 'I Will Be What I Will Be.' This not only captures something of the mystery of God, it is a deeply significant moment in Scripture. To know God's name brings us into a more intimate relationship with the creator of the universe.

The third commandment handed to Moses states that the Israelites shall not "swear falsely by the name of the Lord your God." Most assume that the command prohibits the use of God's name as a swear word, but in her book, *Bearing God's Name: Why Sinai Still Matters*, Carmen Joy Imes suggests that the answer to understanding the name command starts with a better translation: "You must not bear (or carry) the name of Yahweh, your God, in vain, for Yahweh will not hold guiltless one who bears (or carries) his name in vain."

We bear God's name and honour this in the way we live out our lives. We need to reflect deeply on this and our responsibilities when naming people and their conditions.

Reflections

- Think of someone you know struggling with mental health issues. How has it impacted their identity?
- Why might attending Church be difficult for someone with a mental health condition?
- Should we discuss mental health more openly in Church and, if so, how might we do this responsibly?
- During the sermon we talked about the importance of lament in broadening the imagination of our worship. Why is lament such an important part of the Christian journey?

Resources

John Swinton's book <u>Finding Jesus in the Storm</u> is the go-to text for learning about the spiritual lives of Christians with mental health challenges (Norwich: SCM Press, 2020).

Swinton has appeared on numerous podcasts, such as The Weight.

Carmen Joy Imes's book <u>Bearing God's Name: Why Sinai Still Matters</u> (Illinois: IVP Press, 2019) is a glorious piece of popular Old Testament scholarship. If you struggle to understand the significance of the Hebrew Bible or maybe think it's all about fusty old laws, pick up a copy of this book. It will bring things into perspective for you in ways you will not have expected.

Imes is a great teacher; you get a sense of her contagious enthusiasm from her weekly videos on Exodus, <u>Torah Tuesday</u>.

Links to these resources are imbedded into the electronic copy. Just click on the underlined words.