

*I will sing hymns with my spirit, but with my mind as well – 1 Corinthians 14:15*

Dear Friends

Last week I was listening to a news report that expressed serious concern for the mental health of people the longer this pandemic continues. Indeed, now that it seems apparent that some adjustment to our patterns and routines may be with us for quite some time, mental health within and among us will be an ongoing issue.

It made me ask myself the question, *What is the relationship between spirituality and mental health?* They aren't the same thing even though I am sure they are related. I have my suspicions of the answer but I put the question to a friend who is a psychiatrist. His answer was interesting. He said, "Spirituality is a fundamental foundation of good mental health." As a mental health professional he is quick to point out that this is true of a developed spirituality in any faith system/paradigm. What matters, he goes on, is the "joy, peace, sense of agency, and connection" that arises from a mature spirituality.

As a Christian I can easily identify what he means. 'Joy' is at the heart of our shared life (*this is the day that God has made, let us rejoice and be glad together*). 'Peace', both inner and societal, is what we pray for every week. 'Sense of agency' may be described as mission, the idea that we are here together to make a difference in the world that God so loves. And 'connection' is just another word for communion, the promise that Christ joins us as one with generations past, present and future.

Clearly, people of faith are not immune from the stresses and strains on mental wellbeing. With our neighbours we share the experience that this is a difficult time and that we are constantly being asked to reimagine what is normal. Our equilibrium has been upended and so we are constantly thinking about what is required and how this may end.

But we are not without resources. A lifetime of prayer and praise, mission and ministry, has prepared us for a moment such as this. As Paul famously says in Philippians chapter 4: "the peace of God which is beyond all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus."

What is the relationship between (Christian) spirituality and mental health? Our minds are guarded. Not a bad deal if you think about it.

Grace and peace,

Michael