

You Will Be Found

Will you please pray with me: Holy God, may the words of my mouth and the meditations of all of our hearts be faithful and pleasing unto you, for you are our rock and our salvation. Amen.

When I taught at Kettering University, I had a student whose writing showed me that he didn't think the way I do. When I think, I think linearly—A leads to B leads to C. We say that, in writing, paragraphs should be written in this linear pattern because it is logical and writing like that will help the ideas make sense to the reader.

But as I read his paper, I found that there wasn't that "logical" progression. Idea A didn't lead to B at all, as far as I could see. In fact, idea B needed its own paragraph entirely and was hardly related to idea A. When I mentioned this to him, he sat quietly and then asked how I think. Have you ever been asked that before? How do you think? See if you can answer that question for yourself now. Do you think in words? Do you think in images? Is your mind super busy or quiet? When trying to formulate an idea or when having a conversation, do you think in a linear pattern?

I told my student about my linear pattern of thinking and then he explained his. When he thinks of an idea, all of the other ideas related to it suddenly appear all at once. It's not a linear pattern where one thing leads to the next; it's a simultaneous explosion of ideas. That's why his essay was structured the way it was. He honestly couldn't understand the linear pattern I was describing and I was totally overwhelmed by the explosion of ideas he was describing. Our ways of thinking were alien to each other, but my way of thinking was the one he would be required to follow in every job he ever had.

That student was brilliant and very successful in classes where he didn't have to write, could mainly use images and graphs,

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and could have audiobooks read to him. And, because his brain works in a different way than the way society suggests it should work, he had to work five times as hard as most students and probably still does in his job. It had been that way his entire life, making him one of the hardest working, most dedicated students I had ever known. But he constantly had to fight with the university, with other professors, even with his friends to get the accommodations he deserved and to just gain some understanding. He ended up founding a mental health club on campus that had bi-weekly meetings aimed at helping neurotypical and neurodivergent people help one another. He got some changes instituted that would help students like him, and he graduated and got a good job in his field.

I will extol you, O Lord, for you have drawn me up,  
and did not let my foes rejoice over me.

I'm going to tell you another story. On Mother's Day this year, I was talking with a woman with Alzheimer's. She would start off a sentence with one idea, but end it on a completely different one. But if I looked around the room, I could figure out her train of thought. She'd start by talking about the birds she could see outside, but then would glance to the side and see a picture of her cat, so she'd end talking about the cat. In her mind, this made sense. She was telling me what she was seeing and that it was beautiful. She also lived so much in the moment, that she talked constantly, telling the same story over and over in a single loop because she didn't remember that she had just been talking or that she had just told that story. However, at one moment, something clicked and she knew that what she had said didn't make sense in the traditional way. So looked at me and said, I'm sorry that I am so wrong, that I keep messing up. I'm just so wrong. I responded by

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using a phrase from a psychological help group she had attended when she was younger saying, “you’re not wrong, you’re average,” which means, “you’re not wrong—you are the way you are and there are a lot of people in the world experiencing the same things you are.” She smiled and went back to her stories about the birds and the cats.

Sing praises to the Lord, O you his faithful ones,  
and give thanks to his holy name.  
Weeping may linger for the night,  
but joy comes with the morning.

One last story. A friend of mine lives with chronic depression. He can experience weeks, maybe months at a time feeling content and purposeful. But when the depression hits, it gets really hard. He can struggle just to get out of bed in the morning, to take care of himself, and to believe that he has any kind of useful purpose in the world. Even though he is one of the kindest people I know who has done a lot of good for others, when he is depressed, he can’t see that. He told me once that, when he’s depressed, he even struggles with his faith—a lot. In the midst of depression, he feels like he is in a deep, dark pit—like the one described in our Old Testament reading. He can logically know that God exists and that God has even miraculously shown up in his life in the past. But he can’t *feel* it. His emotions won’t let him *feel* it and instead make him feel surrounded by a dark pit. He, his family, and his therapist get him through this time by the reminders that feelings aren’t facts. He knows, mentally, that things will get better and, even though he can’t *feel* that they will or even *believe* that they will, he just has to trust what his memories tell him, which is that they will. He has to trust that he will feel God again. But he has confided that, at times, he wonders what is wrong with him. Isn’t there something wrong with him, if he can’t feel the love and presence of God, if he can’t

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feel and believe in the goodness of himself? No, there is nothing wrong with him. He has a disease that alters his feelings, but that doesn't make *him* wrong. It makes him pretty normal, as this happens to many, many people who live with many, many different types of mental health challenges.

O Lord, you brought up my soul from Sheol,  
restored me to life from among those gone down to the Pit.

In all of these stories, we see examples of neurodivergent people—one born thinking in a different way and two with diseases that have damaged and/or changed their brains. How does our faith respond to this? Where is God in all of this struggle?

Our scripture tells us that God is always trying to provide a path of hope and a community of love.

See, the home of God is among mortals.  
He will dwell with them;  
they will be his peoples,  
and God himself will be with them;  
he will wipe every tear from their eyes.  
Death will be no more;  
mourning and crying and pain will be no more,  
for the first things have passed away.

As this passage suggests, some of that hope comes from knowing that God is present and dwelling with us now through the Holy Spirit, but also from a belief that God will make all things new. To me, this newness and perfect life with God doesn't imply that God will necessarily change the brains of people born neurodivergent because there is nothing wrong with them. Scripture *does* suggest that God will heal the sick and the hurt so that there will be no more mourning and crying. But what if the new heaven and the new earth that Jesus Christ ushered in and is

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trying to get us to live into, what if that new heaven and new earth was a place of acceptance for differences? What if the thing that will pass away is prejudice, social stigma, and requirements of the majority that everyone think the same way? What if the water of life God promises is a water that helps us all accept and love ourselves, and our neighbors for who we are, people made in God's image?

In the meantime, while we work towards and wait on this new heaven and earth, God still lives and works among us. God sees you, beloved, and deeply loves you. So where is God in those stories and in the stories of our other beloved neurodivergent siblings? I believe that God responds the way Jesus tells us the shepherd responds to the lamb in the story I told the children. God loves you, you who are neurodivergent, you with mental illnesses, with brain changes, with addictions. God loves you so much that God will leave the flock—the rest of society that is considered neurotypical—and come to find you to bring you back to the fold. God will carry you, when you cannot carry yourself. God will believe in you and for you, when you cannot believe in yourself. And God will love you unconditionally and forever, because you are made in God's image—you, in your brain that thinks in explosions. You, in your brain that remembers only the moment you are currently in. You, in your brain that sometimes gets dark and fearful. All of you, who are neurodivergent. God loves you. And if you feel lost in this world that doesn't understand you or that stigmatizes you, remember: you will be found. Thanks be to God. Amen.