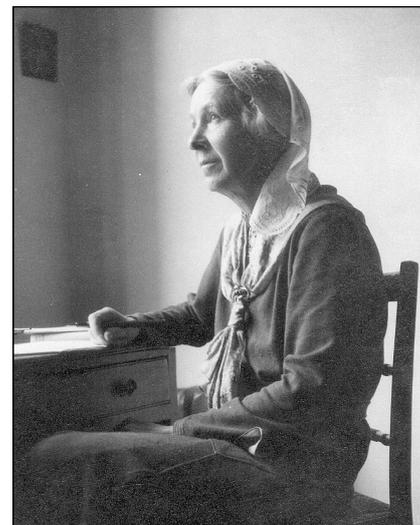


Evelyn Underhill was born on 6th December 1875 in Wolverhampton. From an early age she described having mystical insights, and her deep interest in spiritual matters continued throughout her life. Between 1921 and 1924 her spiritual director was Baron Friedrich von Hügel, who encouraged her to place Jesus Christ more centrally at the heart of her reflections. After his death in 1925 she began taking on a prominent role in the Church of England, leading retreats at Pleshey and elsewhere, and as a spiritual guide to many. Amongst the books she published are 'Mysticism' (in 1911) and 'Worship' (in 1936). She was one of the first women theologians to give public lectures at English universities, and was the first woman allowed officially to teach Church of England clergy. She died on 15th June 1941.



The Pleshey Retreat House is located in the Essex village of Pleshey, and is the official Retreat House of the Diocese of Chelmsford. Quiet days and retreats continue to be held throughout the year, as pioneered by Evelyn Underhill. Many of her books and other personal possessions are still kept at the Retreat House, and her influence remains strong.

Preacher's Notes and Ideas

The lectionary Gospel Reading at Communion Services on 19th June is Luke 8:26-39: Jesus Heals the Gerasene Demoniac

Then Jesus and his disciples arrived at the country of the Gerasenes, which is opposite Galilee. As Jesus stepped out on land, a man of the city who had demons met him. For a long time he had worn no clothes, and he did not live in a house but in the tombs. When he saw Jesus, he fell down before him and shouted at the top of his voice, 'What have you to do with me, Jesus, Son of the Most High God? I beg you, do not torment me'—for Jesus had commanded the unclean spirit to come out of the man. (For many times it had seized him; he was kept under guard and bound with chains and shackles, but he would break the bonds and be driven by the demon into the wilds.) Jesus then asked him, 'What is your name?' He said, 'Legion'; for many demons had entered him. They begged him not to order them to go back into the abyss.

Now there on the hillside a large herd of swine was feeding; and the demons begged Jesus to let them enter these. So he gave them permission. Then the demons came out of the man and entered the swine, and the herd rushed down the steep bank into the lake and was drowned.

When the swineherds saw what had happened, they ran off and told it in the city and in the country. Then people came out to see what had happened, and when they came to Jesus, they found the man from whom the demons had gone sitting at the feet of Jesus, clothed and in his right mind. And they were afraid. Those who had seen it told them how the one who had been possessed by demons had been healed. Then all the people of the surrounding country of the Gerasenes asked Jesus to leave them; for they were seized with great fear. So he got into the boat and returned. The man from whom the demons had gone begged that he might be with him; but Jesus sent him away, saying, 'Return to your home, and declare how much God has done for you.' So he went away, proclaiming throughout the city how much Jesus had done for him.

Text

Living in the tombs implies perpetual uncleanness and separation from society

Wilderness areas were thought to be favoured haunts of demons

The former demoniac declares what *God* has done in terms of what *Jesus* has done

Sermon Idea: A Focus on Mental Health

World Mental Health Day: Monday, 10 October 2016

In any year one in four of us experiences a mental health problem

About 10% of children have a mental health problem at any one time depression affects one in five older people

Self-harm statistics for the UK show one of the highest rates in Europe: 400 per 100,000

One in four families worldwide has at least one member with a behavioural or mental disorder

Spirituality can play an important role in helping people maintain good mental health and live with or recover from mental health problems.

See more at: <https://www.mentalhealth.org.uk/a-to-z/s/spirituality#sthash.xlu3TZJd.dpuf>

Sermon Idea: An Ignatian Exercise

Read, Reflect and Respond – encourage members of the congregation to listen again to the gospel passage. As you re-read this slowly and deliberately, invite them to visualise the scene and try to establish their role within it. Are you the demoniac? Are you a pig? Are you Jesus? Reflect on ‘walking in the other’s shoes’. Consider a Christian response following from this reflection – either as a congregation or as individuals.

Quotes

Evelyn Underhill (1937) reminded us that: *Our favourite distinction between spiritual life and practical life is false. We cannot divide them ... For a spiritual life is simply a life in which all that we do comes from the centre, where we are anchored in God: a life soaked through and through by a sense of His reality and claim, and self-given to the great movement of His will.* (‘Spirituality and Mental Health: Breakthrough’ eds. Philip J Barker and Poppy Buchanan-Barker, page 13)

Underhill recognised the value of psychology to make self-improvement but distrusted psychology’s tendency to suggest that we do so by our own resolve (*Ways*, 206-7). She realized that the first step in recovery is the admission of our helplessness and need for a purifying effect beyond our mental health or usefulness (*Ways*, 207). The passive purification provoked by the discovery that we cannot do it ourselves “really kills our self-esteem and leaves nothing, not even self-improvement, in which to take pride. And *then* we begin to be fit to speak to other souls of God” (*Ways*, 211). Here by self-esteem she clearly meant some defence of our ego trying to be independent of God’s help. And she perceived clearly that God’s patient, purifying action takes place in separations, disappointments, and dealings with difficult people (*Ways*, 211). (Evelyn Underhill: *Spirituality for Daily Living* by Annice Callahan, page 108)

Mysticism is the art of union with Reality. The mystic is a person who has attained that union in greater or less degree; or who aims at and believes in such attainment. (Evelyn Underhill, *Practical Mysticism*, page 8)

Evelyn Underhill’s typologies for Mental Health:

Awakening of self / Purgation / Illumination / Penumbra (dark night of the soul) / Union

There is not department of life which asks from those who study it so much humble sympathy, such a wide, genial, unfastidious spirit, or so constant a remembrance of our own limitations as this; nor one in which it is more necessary to remember the wholesome reminder of the psychologist that we ourselves however apparently civilised, are still possessed of a primitive sub-consciousness which is nowhere more active than in the practices of our religion. (Evelyn Underhill – *Essential Writings*, page 98-99)

If we desire a simple test of the quality of our spiritual life, a consideration of the tranquillity, gentleness and strength with which we deal with the circumstances of our outward life will serve us better than anything that is based on the loftiness of our religious notions, or fervour of our religious feelings. It is a test that can be applied anywhere and at any time. Tranquillity, gentleness and strength, carrying us through the changes of weather, the ups and downs of the route, the varied surface of the road; the inequalities of family life, emotional and professional disappointments, the sudden intervention of bad fortune or bad health, the rising and falling of our religious temperature. This is the threefold imprint of the Spirit on the souls surrendered to his great action. (Heaven A Dance – An Evelyn Underhill Anthology, compiled by Brenda & Stuart Blanch, page 127)

Useful Links

www.mentalhealthmatters-cofe.org/worship-resources.html

www.nouwen-network.com/worship-resources.pdf

www.time-to-change.org.uk

www.mind.org.uk

www.mentalhealth.org.uk/