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The narratives and meanings dementia

What kind of story do we tell?

What emotions and convictions shape these stories?

How do we access the facts - what is the clinical story of Dementia?

What are our personal stories of memory, change and age?

The Human Story



"With desperation I pray that I will not fall over the edge into that dark chasm of total blackness . . ."



Anger



Loss and Pain as autonomy is lost



The indignity of the slow relentless loss of sociality

Organising Questions?

If a person with dementia is 'praying without understanding', what do we think is going on?

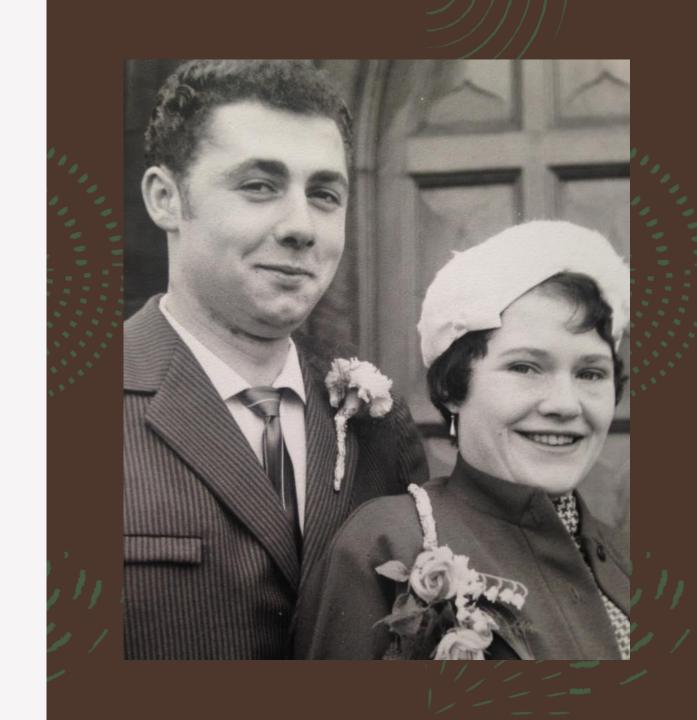
If a person with dementia is still loved by God, what does that tell us about God and faith?

How can we as a Church minister to people with dementia and their carers?

What is the Good News that we have to preach to a society terrified of dementia?

What is the purpose of liturgy and worship when the relationship between words and cognition is altered?

A Personal Story



Starting Points



Jean Vanier 'Why do the strong need the weak?' The Church as a Community of belonging

Reflecting on a materialist and functional Culture that shapes our productivity and purpose?

Challenging all that depersonalises and dehumanises

Nurturing our Pastoral Heart and Wisdom Listening to and celebrating our experience and gifts

Our Values





[We] ... espouse hyper-cognitive values ... and as a result[we]have been blind to the emotional, relational, aesthetic, creative, and spiritual values that give worth to the lives of the deeply forgetful. [We] are not interested in the enduring selves... to be a person requires the ability to project rational plans as moral agents into the future. People with Alzheimer's disease do not have this capacity, and therefore they are deemed something less than persons.

(Stephen G Post, Hope in Caring for the Deeply Forgetful)

Our model of productivity and purpose

... The American paradox is to glory in individualism but to value the individual chiefly for what s/he achieves in society. It is not hard to determine what such a society's opinion will be of someone who is judged to have lost both individuality and productivity to dementia

(Van de Kreek)

We need to attempt an insight into spirituality and dementia because

If we can't see the spirituality, it's hard to see the God who is also present in dementia

If we can't see the spirituality, it's hard to see the person

If we can't see the spirituality, we can't respond to what matters deeply to them



I'VE LEARNED THAT PEOPLE WILL FORGET WHAT YOU SAID, **PEOPLE WILL FORGET** WHAT YOU DID, BUT **PEOPLE WILL NEVER FORGET HOW YOU** MADE THEM FEEL.

-Maya Angelou



Where is God in all of this?

That God speaks through concrete circumstances and historical developments.

That to the extent that the church responds it has legitimacy as 'church'

Thus, true ecclesiology is attentive to the liberation of individuals and groups

Shaping our Human presence

People with Dementia can be deceived, treated like a child, mocked or ignored

We all remain people - held unconditionally within the love of God - people who retain their personhood until death.

What about the *Enduring Self*? What happens to us when we no longer have the ability to project rational plans as moral agents?

Somewhere within the confusion the spirit of the person remains

Memory can be accessed

Time, Memory and History are still present

... which raises the question

If our personhood is essentially 'held in common' and loaned to us for a period of time, is the same true of our faith?

If so, what is the role of the church?