

Inside this issue:

**Mental Illness
Awareness Week**

February 20-25, 2006

Wait for the Lord 2

Poem:
Expectation 3

Frankie Has
Cancer 4

Majorly Depressed 5

A Story of Hope 6

Poem:
Solitude-Hell 7

An Old Cherokee

Remembering the
Sabbath 8

Crisis Intervention
Numbers

Razor's Edge - An Impossible Landscape

"Razors Edge: An Impossible Landscape" will powerfully open Mental Illness Awareness Week which is being held February 20-25 at the Lutheran Theological Seminary at Gettysburg.

On Monday, evening February 20 at 7:00 pm in Valentine Auditorium those in attendance will see an intimate, close-up look at serious mental illness through the art, poetry and journal entries of Dawn Befano (1974-1995).

Dawn's writings will be dramatically read and her psychologist, Gregory Powell, will present a talk on "Caring and Tragedy: Learning from Suicide". Her mother, Jeanne Befano, a member of the Middler class at LTSG will also speak. There will be time for questions.

Childcare will be available, and refreshments will be provided for the Monday evening event.

Continue the Discussion by Coming "To the Table"

On Wednesday and Thursday February 22 and 23 the Seminary Community is invited "To The Table" for conversations regarding ministry with and to those with mental illness.

Pastor Kathy Vitalis-Hoffman will host these conversations during lunchtime in the upper dining room in the Seminary Refectory.

The conversation on Wednesday, February 22, will focus on a pastoral response to those who are mentally ill. The discussion will include ways to make referrals, how to

keep healthy boundaries, and how to converse with someone who is threatening suicide.

On Thursday, Feb. 23, the table talk will focus on ways to engage the whole community in caring ministries for those who are experiencing mental illness. Stories and ideas will be shared. For more information contact Pastor Kathy at khoffman@ltsg.edu or ext. 2153.



Painting "**The Scream**" (1893)
by Edvard Munch.

This famous painting is commonly thought of as depicting the experience of mental illness. Location: National Gallery in Oslo, Norway

Wait for the Lord by Lucinda Francisco

Wait for the Lord; be strong and take heart and wait for the Lord.

She offered me an entire case of black olives,
a picnic lunch,
five-hundred dollars,
if I would just come to her house when she went home.

"I like you," she said. "You have pretty hair and nice teeth."
She had one tooth, as it was.
The first time we spoke she sang nearly all she said
like I had fallen into a monotone opera.
"What is your feeling on pre-mar-it-tal sex? Go on. Speak up."

As consolation for not being able to go I suggested
we imagine that trip to Italy and the one to California.
Who knows what we'll invent tomorrow –
the weather on Venus?
strange names of fish in the Amazon River?
what it would be like to not be betrayed by the chemicals of one's mind?

She wanted to read Revelation chapter two
To the angel of the church in Ephesus...
...in Smyrna...
...in Pergamum...
...in Thyatira...
...you tolerate that woman Jezebel...
...I will cast her on a bed of suffering...

To the angel of the church in Behavioral Health...
... in Oncology...
...in Cardiovascular...
...in Surgery...

"Sometimes the appropriate response to reality is to go insane."



"I like you,"
she said. "You
have pretty
hair and nice
teeth."
She had one
tooth, as it was.

Expectation by Matthew Beers

Expectation, solicitation, laughter.
 Never tears,
 Only those things remembered,
 Reminiscid.
 Perhaps this is heaven,
 All there is of heaven
 Perhaps this is all there can be
 Of heaven.

In the midst of singing,
 Praying our dreams,
 Shedding our desires through our tears,
 Imagining an impossible world that
 Simply cannot be—will never be,
 I hear voices, an exchange—
 Giggles—care free,
 Laughter—apathy.
 These voices are focused on one another,
 Tuned to each word,
 Staring into the soul of their God.
 They worship truly, bow at the feet
 Of the living one.
 They do not betray with twisted thorns,
 With torn flesh,
 The rips which reveal hell.
 They know their God
 The face, that trace,
 God hiding within,
 Who knows where?
 They enjoy their God—A God
 Without sanctuary,
 Without silence,
 Within the ecstasy of laughter.

Perhaps this is heaven,
 All there can be of heaven.

Perhaps this is heaven,
 All there can be of heaven;
 The cold, cruel reality that fate
 Throws us toward an abyss
 An abyss no bigger than a box
 Where laughter turns to tears
 Solicitation to prayers
 Expectation to faith.

Perhaps this is heaven,
 All there can be of heaven;
 To sleep,
 To dream,
 To be still,
 To die.



Frankie Has Cancer ...anonymous

Frankie Has Cancer

“The ambulance that came last night, came for Frankie. He has cancer, you know.”
I was glad that I was hearing this on the other end of a telephone,
Because I didn't want her to know that I was delighted.
Frankie has cancer.
I should feel sorry for him. I should pray for him.
I shouldn't be so joyful.
Frankie has cancer!

It seems befitting.
Every time I came home to visit over the past 25 years, I had to look at him.
I had to live with the fact that he dealt drugs across the street from my parents.
I had to see his emaciated Chihuahua that ate its own feces
because it was starving.
I had to see Frankie's long, unkempt hair and bedraggled
features, his hideous face.
Frankie has cancer.
I never said “hi” to him when I saw him.
I never cared to.



Frankie has cancer.
I'm going into ministry, I should forgive him.
But he has never asked me.
And I don't feel like it.
My friends are chaplains at the hospital he's at.
I wonder who knows him.
I should pay him a visit.
What would I say to him?
Hi, Frankie. Do you know who I am?
I am the little girl whose soul you stole 43 years ago, along with your friends.
You, Frankie, you were the first. I'll bet you told your friends,
“She's easy. She'll let you.”
You were right.
Stanley, the babysitter's son and Roland your next-door neighbor.
Was it good for you, Frankie? I hope it was because I am still paying for it.

Do you know who I am?
I am the one who has stumbled through life wondering why God would even
Care to love me, since I am so unlovable
I'm the one who prayed God's forgiveness for my feelings of sexuality when I was a teenager.
I'm the one who couldn't have sex without feeling dirty.
Then when I did, it was unprotected because I was too ashamed to get protection.
And like you, my partners didn't value me enough either.
I'm the one who got divorced twice,
The one who has spent countless days of loneliness within and out of marriage

So, you have cancer.
I wish I could say I was sorry, and that you would be missed.
But not really

And when you die, I'll still be paying for the fun you had with me when I was five.

Majorly Depressed

by Matthew Beers

A journal entry from the majorly depressed--an *An-khora-ite*.

December, 2005. Absurd! Absurd! Life is absurd! I curse the day I began to think, I rue it, for *beginning to think is beginning to be undermined*, there were days I remember when I lived in ignorant bliss, but I was consumed in knowledge that left me knowing nothing at all, my pursuit of the infinite, of God, forbidden to me by the very texts that provide the ground, *Khora*, for my finite existence, texts that express my finitude, blank pages, open margins, the impossible exposed in its nothingness, its blankness, its utter unknowability, *tout autre*, the great chasm, that dreaded abyss, the abyssal grave that consumes all possibility, yet disallowing, delimiting my ability to express it, to know it, the finite text a boundary marker denying entry to where I most desperately want to go, the pursuit, the accomplishments achieved along the way, all absurd, an absurd journey, for I am finite attempting to acquire the infinite, the infinite the abyssal grave that hungers for my flesh, *when one looks into the abyss, the abyss also looks into you*, wishing to consume me, the dreadful price I must pay, my annihilation, to achieve the impossible, my infinitude, *oh that I may find my rest and peace in you! oh, that you would come into my heart and so inebriate it that I would forget my own evils and embrace my one and only good, which is you! what are you to me? have mercy on me that I may speak. . what am I to you, that you should demand to be loved by me? that you should be angry with me, if I fail to love you, and should threaten me with utmost misery? and not to love you, is not this in itself misery enough?...do not hide your face from me, let me die, lest I should die indeed; only let me see your face*, but the marker is exposed, beyond it only nothing, nothing! Absurd! Absurd! Life is absurd! now the mirror is cracked, the pills exposed, *pharmakon*, containing both cure and curse, potent and poison, life and death, a dual chambered heart,....suicide, an option and solution, necessity, to end this life is to

put an end to absurdity, to live is to suffer a perpetual inner death in this grand absurd play of forces that play simply to play, for no other reason but to play, *the venomous words disappeared without an echo, leaving behind not the slightest trace, all that remained was the laughter of the Game as It danced and played across an endless space*, Absurd! what caused this transformation? who has cast me outside the city walls where I now weep and gnash my teeth, they asked that question, and I answered, "I read, I think, I am filled with passion for God, the impossible goal," what happened to your faith, they ask, but like St. Jacques they do not know that *the constancy of God in my life is called by other names, so that I rightly pass for an atheist, the omnipresence to me of what I call God in my absolved, absolutely private language, absolutely private language doing anything other than talking to me without saying anything, nor a transcendent law or an immanent shechina, that feminine figure of a Yahweh who remains so strange and so familiar to me, but the secret I am excluded from*, excluded from this secret by the very language that allows me to think the secret, excluded by my inclusion, rejection through embrace, loyalty shone in the knife, *et tu Brute*, for to be a true christian is to kill the infidel to protect the souls of the weak-minded who may ignorantly and foolishly begin to seek God, the impossible, only to meet the abyssal grave, Absurd! to live or die, it is thought and religious passion that has driven me to the brink of suicide, perhaps thought and religious passion will drive me toward life, I will, in my deepest depression, while grasping these pills explore the purpose and meaning of this absurd existence, perhaps bring an answer to my question; is it better to live or die? life or death, death or god: *the secret, the absolute secret, which inspires literature, which gives it passion(s), which no one is going to come along and solve, like a riddle, with a secret code*, my decision; it is better to die, for I must die in order to live, *I don't take my life, mais je me donne la mort*.

A Story of Hope by Arwyn Pierce

At a small revitalized urban church there is a very diverse, hurting group of people who are seeking hope and peace in their neighborhood and congregation. This hope, comes from within the congregation's arms.

A few weeks ago, this small, struggling congregation received back into its worshipping community two women who had left the area for a year and have recently moved back. Their arrival gave hope to the congregation. They were good givers more than merely financially. They were instrumental in planning and cooking infamous pork dinners and they helped organize and disperse the food for our local Homeless Shelter and the Lutheran Mission Society. They also provide other valuable leadership in the congregation. When these women returned last week, they were greeted warmly by the rest of the gathered worshippers-another sign of hope for the congregation that is transforming and growing. All throughout the service I noticed how people would turn and smile, or greet them with a hug, and I smiled to myself.

During the sermon, I noticed a man from the congregation who had come into the service a bit late-someone who hadn't been to worship in quite some time. This man has been a member of this church for his entire life. He attends service when he is able; however, most of his contact is through me and the Deacon as he calls us periodically to have us pray for him and visit him as he struggles.



Grievously, he has been plagued by drug addiction, alcoholism, depression and numerous other demons in his life. His addictions, combined with medical problems, have put him on disability. He is unable to work, maintain a healthy household, his clothes are often disheveled, his hair and beard are scraggly, and at times his speech is severely slurred and his sentences are not put together in an intelligible manner.

This man came to worship the same Sunday as the two returning women, and he was greeted with equal enthusiasm and warmth as the people were dispersing. Many of the members said as they embraced him warmly, "Joe, it's so good to see you again! We've been praying for you!"

He looked at me with a tear in his eye and said. "They didn't just recognize me... they remembered my name. I'm somebody to these people here. Ain't God good!"

God is good, and I think that the congregation, at the end of the service had found equal, if not more hope in their returned friend "Joe" than in the return of the other two women.

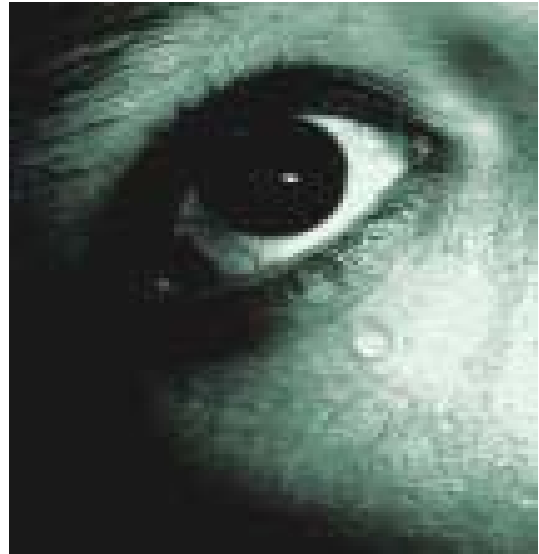
Solitude--Hell by Matthew Beers

Solitude--Hell

There is a soft humming outside these walls,
Phantom walls.
There is a strange light.
Its source? I don't know
I cannot go to that light,
I cannot move;
I am surrounded by the soft hum,
The drone that drowns all else;
A drone which assaults my senses,
Invades my consciousness,
Shatters my psyche,
Confuses my intelligence.

Solitude--Hell

Sleeping,
Dreaming,
Speaking,
Laughing,
Breathing,
(If I could breathe)
Each breath fills my lungs;
A sulfuric stench,
Those million searing needles
Prick my soul.
It is a most vile and sour stench--
The air filled with solitude,
The stench of hell,
Of rotting flesh,
Of raw waste,
Of fresh earth newly dug,
Of funeral flowers,
(The stench of Easter).
I stared at the hole in the ground
Wondering how it would feel,
Which sensations would flood over me
As crashing waves if I lie in it,
If I cross my arms
To rest in a pool of tears.



An Old Cherokee

— Author Unknown

An old Cherokee is telling his grandson about a fight that is going on inside of him. He said it is between two wolves.

One is evil: Anger, envy, sorrow, regret, greed, arrogance, self-pity, guilt, resentment, inferiority, lies, false pride, superiority and ego.

The other is good: Joy, peace, love, hope, serenity, humility, kindness, benevolence, empathy, generosity, truth, compassion and faith.

The grandson thought about it for a minute and then asked his grandfather,

"Which wolf wins?"

The old Cherokee simply replied,

"The one I feed."

Remembering the Sabbath by Max Miller

I can recall my frustration not being with my grandmother but with the level of sickness that had caused the dementia, I was beyond her memory. The care facility that she resided in was a block behind the complex where I lived, so I visited her often. Every time she would say, "You never come see me anymore." Eventually that level of recognition began to fail, and slowly it became "Who are you?" she needed deeper care, and was moved to another facility.

During a Christmas break, I picked her up to take her to my parents place for the holiday. The entire hour-and-a-half trip she asked the same two questions. "Who are you?" "Where are we going?" After every answer I gave her, she would smile and say, "You are such a nice boy," before asking one of the two questions a minute later. I knew then, I had lost my grandmother.

We had arrived at my parents' house, and unpacked the car. I was invited to a friend's annual Christmas party in the area, so I got ready and left. I don't remember anything about the party except for this:

I pulled into my parents' driveway about 2:30am. Frost from the cold Michigan December had already layered patterns on the windshields and windows along the faintly lit street. There was a light on, and this puzzled me. *Why did my mom and dad leave the living room light on?* Usually, if I was going to be late, they would just leave the porch light on. Once I stepped inside, I saw my grandma fully dressed with her hat, coat and mittens all on sitting holding her purse in her lap. I asked with the fullest kindness I could muster, "Grandma, what are you doing up so late?" She answered, "Who are you?" with a smile. "I'm your grandson." I said in a low soft voice not to wake everyone else. She then said, "I'm ready for church, when are we leaving for church?" I held back the tears, and explained, "Grandma, we aren't going to church for two

more days, and it's 3 o'clock in the morning." She smiled the warmest kind of smile that only a grandmother can smile, and said with the sweetest of tones, "I guess I better get back to bed then." I helped her back to her room, and she closed the door and went back to bed.

I realized something. The Third Commandment, remembering the Sabbath. My grandmother's sickness, the slow agonizing galvanizing of her brain, could not stop her from knowing God. **Every day** was the Sabbath for her. I don't know how long she sat there, and I learned later that she was found many times at her facility, sitting in a chair waiting for everyone else to get up so someone could take her to church. Remembering me, or any of her grandchildren, eventually even her children, had become completely unimportant. We are to remember our God, and give every moment and memory to our God.

(copyrighted material printed with permission of Max Miller)

If you or someone you love is suffering from the darkness of mental illness please talk to someone. Seek help and **don't** try to "go it alone."

Adams/Hanover Counseling Service Crisis Intervention Program

625 West Elm Ave
Hanover, PA 17331

(717) 632 4900

[Crisis Line] (717) 632 4900

(717) 334 0468

(717) 637 3711 After Hours: Hanover Hospital

(717) 334 2121 After Hours: Gettysburg Hospital

(800) 673 2426

The editors:

Tina Minnich &
Lucy Francisco

