

1. Last fall, hosted an all-day workshop on teen suicide

- materials by “Soul Shop Movement”
- presenter = Cindy Birkner, conf youth leader
- her daughter had tried to commit suicide

2. Why don't we discuss this in church?!?

- in Gospel of Mark a woman who had been sick was healed when she secretly touched Js' clothes
- she had been sick for 12 years and was probably publicly shamed & had to hide her pain
- the religious community has not always been good about being a place to openly share
  
- Why?
- pretentiousness: busy wearing our holy masks?
- bad theology: is it a sin or hell thing?
- fear: will talking about suicide make it seem like an option?
  - \* the church should be a place where we can openly share our feelings, fears, pains, and deepest questions!

3. We need to ask how we can help prep our youth (and one another) for our darkest days --- we certainly prep youth for all else:

- drugs, sex, parties, driving, peer pressure ---why not prep for darkest day?!? & how?
- how can we talk to them at a time when they are not down or desperate to let them know that dark days will come and to know in advance that they will get better?
- remember last week's scripture from Lk 4 where Js reads from Is 61? one version ---
- “the Spirit of the Lord is upon us  
because the Lord has sent us to...  
bind up the broken-hearted  
proclaim freedom to those  
who are captive and  
release prisoners from the darkness”

4. “Soul Movement” uses this phrase instead of a person being labeled as suicidal, they speak of “suicidal desperation”

- this is a better description of the desperation that grabs someone leaving them feeling “alone, trapped and in pain”
- Job 7 captures this when it says:

“If I say, ‘My bed will comfort me, my couch will ease my complaint,’ But then I am frightened with dreams and terrified with visions; so that my soul would choose suffocation and death rather than my pains.”

- Or these song lyrics by Rhyme & Reason:

“My head won’t leave my head alone.”

- Or the Psalmist in Psalm 33:

“I’m worn out, completely crushed; I groan because of my miserable heart.”

- culminating in Jonah’s declaration in Jonah 1.3:

“Now, O Lord, take away my life.

It is better for me to die than to live.”

5. “Suicidal Desperation” is a problem in our society

- highest rate is my age group (45-64) 19.1%

- followed by the next two older groups

- young adults (15-24) are at 15.9%

\*all the #s are WAY too high!

In a 2011 survey of high schoolers

- 16% had considered suicide that year

- 13% had made a suicide plan &

- 8% had attempted suicide

And our friends who identify as LGBTQ: (lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgendered or unsure) are even more at risk due to our society’s homophobia and intolerance

Let me ask:

- has anyone here been affected by someone who attempted suicide?

- clearly we need to do something!

6. We can start by removing all shame from openly discussing mental health struggles, for some, they come during a season of darkness around grief or loss or something else ---for others, the darkness can be relentless ---

The church of Jesus cannot be a church where people suffer for years and merely reach out desperately from the shadows

Listen, seeking help is a sign of strength – not weakness.

30 years ago, after a minor skiing accident, I had surgery on my left shoulder. It hurt and I started my recovery at my Dad’s house. The first morning at home, I woke up in bed and could not get up! I tried and tried but could not generate the momentum to swing up out of bed (something I had always taken for granted)

And I finally had to call out for help.

There are so many people that give all they have each day to generate the momentum to just get out of bed to face another day.

My original children’s sermon was going to focus on how silly it would be to challenge a kid with a broken leg to a race ---responding to their complaints with “Just get over it.” But we do

that time and again to people with mental challenges because we cannot see all the bandages & crutches.

The church needs to be a place where when we ask “How are you today?” that we truly want to hear the answer.

7. The main scripture lesson for today comes from the journeys of Paul in Acts.

The structure of the story is defined by Soul Movement from the perspective of the jailer:

- “First Day” is what they call the jailor’s attitude when he got up that day. Life was going fine (maybe with the normal pressures), but he was unprepared for the challenge he would face.

- Then comes his “Dark Night”. He’s doing his duties when an earthquake strikes, the jail cells are thrown open, and he fears that he has failed at his one job. He certainly wasn’t prepared for this and is so shaken that he decides to take his life.

- Then comes the voice of Paul & Silas (or the Xn Community) “Wait! We are still here with you –in the darkness, in the rubble, we are still here!”

- Then comes what they call the jailor’s “Second Day” – the new day that he never planned for. A new day beyond the darkness – a new morning that he never planned to see. A new day, based in the midst of a new community that embraced him and walked with him thru the darkness.

- Cindy Birkner, the conf youth leader, now annually celebrates with her daughter that “Second Day” ---not the day she tried to kill herself, but that second, unexpected day where they all got a new chance at living and loving together.

8. Another way of interpreting scripture = allegory

- each piece of a story represents something or someone else
- what if the story of the jailer is about what happens in our psyche?
- earthquake = something that literally rocks your life! an event that shakes your very foundations!
- doors flying open = all of those parts of your life that you keep hidden from others come spilling out into the open for everyone to see, judge, ridicule
- “still here” = our ability to embrace our full self in the full light of day

**(slide)** children’s animated movie: “Inside Out”

- Joy, Anger, Fear, Disgust, Sadness
- their whole life is thrown into turmoil
- the beauty of the story is that the turmoil is resolved not by locking anger and sadness in a closet

- but in learning to embrace the fullness of all the emotions and working together

9. The central emphasis of the workshop was to set up a personal PIT Crew ---

P.I.T. = "People I Trust" = identifying three persons who basically say

"if you are ever struggling with any kind of suicidal desperation, you will come to me as someone you can trust"

This is something you set up BEFORE you get to that "First Day" experience

Many of us (especially youth) don't think such a dark day will come ---but it's good to know in advance that someone will be that voice that says "we are still here for you" no matter what

10. And the biggest talent of being on someone's

PIT Crew? **(slide)**

- do you know what this is?

- **HearT**

- 2 ears, one tongue

- James 1.19 "Be quick to listen, slow to speak."

One of the most poignant scriptures is

Lev 10 "And Aaron was silent"

- Aaron was Moses' older brother

- gifted in speech & often spoke for Moses

- but in Lev 10, two of Aaron's sons die = "and Aaron was silent"

- sometimes that's the only response to tragedy

- where the church & preachers often want to rush in with answers

- sometimes it is best to be silent ---present and listening --- but silent

- sometimes words and platitudes and solutions get in the way of simply being present and listening with the heart

11. Those who can speak best are those who have walked thru that dark night of the soul and come out the other side

- 2 such women have spoken here today

- Jane openly shares about her past struggles and invites others to share

- Roxanne has written a book about her experience and would gladly listen and share

*Laughing Again:*

*A Survivor's Guide to Depression*

- And --- me. I haven't experienced all the depths but I've toured the facility

- I've had times when all of life was glorious but my mind could not experience joy instead focusing on that one small speck of impurity

- But I'm still here and ready to listen

If I seem tired today, we did have our niece & nephew at our house last night for a sleepover but I also spent an hour and a half of the night's darkest hours talking to a member of the church desperately in need of a friend

And I am willing to be on your PIT Crew whenever the time may come

- Sometimes the earth will quake and your every foundation may be shaken mental, emotional, physical, spiritual but Southwood is a group of people willing to be a voice in the darkness ready to say "We are still here – for you."

Acts 16:23-34

During the journeys of Paul and Silas, they were falsely accused of disturbing a city. After receiving a severe flogging, they were thrown into prison and the jailer was ordered to keep them securely. Following these instructions, he put them in the innermost cell and fastened their feet in the stocks. About midnight Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns to God, and the prisoners were listening to them. Suddenly there was an earthquake, so violent that the foundations of the prison were shaken; and immediately all the doors were opened and everyone's chains were unfastened. When the jailer woke up and saw the prison doors wide open, he drew his sword and was about to kill himself, since he supposed that the prisoners had escaped. But Paul shouted in a loud voice, "Do not harm yourself, for we are all here." The jailer called for lights, and rushing in, he fell down trembling before Paul and Silas. Then he brought them outside and said, "Sirs, what must I do to be saved?" They answered, "Believe on the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved, you and your household." They spoke the word of the Lord to him and to all who were in his house. At the same hour of the night he took them and washed their wounds; then he and his entire family were baptized without delay. He brought them up into the house and set food before them; and he and his entire household rejoiced that he had become a believer in God.