

To Serve, not to Be Served
The Rev. Deacon Lisa Kirby
October 21, 2018 (Recovery Sunday)

My name is Lisa and I am an alcoholic, and a person in long term recovery, and the immediate past president of Recovery Ministries of the Episcopal Church

This is Recovery Sunday and in our Gospel lesson Jesus proclaims that the son of man is called to serve, not to be served. No where is our service more needed than to those suffering from addiction.

In 2016 the World Health Organization declared addiction/ alcoholism to be the number one health problem in the world. In this country, it is estimated that one in three people has some sort of addiction.

160 people in this country die each day from addictive illness, the vast majority are under the age of 50. We're talking about alcohol and drugs, food nicotine, but also process addictions gambling, shopping, , unhealthy relationships. Any unhealthy substance or behavior we use to make ourselves feel better can become an addiction. In this country, we have come to look outside ourselves for happiness, comfort, or contentment, or a feeling of self-worth. Statistically we are told that one out of 10 people in our pews abuse alcohol. There are many adult children of alcoholics, spouses, parents and friends out there too.

You may be shocked to know that the fastest growing group of heroin addicts is the elderly for whom heroin is a cheaper, easily accessible pain killer. The use of benzodiazepines, such as Valium, other tranquilizers and sleeping pills, far exceeds the diagnoses which warrant their use. They are for short term use, yet many take them far beyond the short term.

I called this a disease, and it is, as declared by the AMA decades ago.. This disease is physical, mental and emotional. It has a genetic link.

This disease kills people, destroys families and communities. I witness overdose deaths and suicides on a far too regular basis, including 2 in the last two weeks. There's a passage in Romans which I think spells out what goes on for the sufferer

"I do not understand my own actions, for I do not do what I want but I do the very thing I hate. I can will what is right, but I cannot do it. For I do not do the good I want but the evil I do not want is what I do." This spells out the symptoms for every person who has ever suffered from this illness.

I think of the men who came to Phillip saying "Sir, we would like to see Jesus". When I was drinking I was weak in faith and I could not see Jesus and certainly didn't think he'd have any use for me anyway .I was like those who were in Jesus presence on the road to Emmaus,

or on the rough seas, but did not recognize him. He was there all along, but they simply could not see him

The Episcopal church has a long standing policy that alcohol is not to be used as a drawing card for an event--no wine tastings, buy a priest a beer day.

Here's a small but important area where parishes can help.

Our church has a national policy which states that when alcohol is served there must be equally available and equally attractive nonalcoholic alternatives and that's not 2 milk jugs of tea and a pitcher of water back between the trash cans. This diocese has adopted the national policy and I hope every parish will do the same.

Any food or drink which contains alcohol anywhere in its preparation must be labeled! Alcohol does not ever completely cook out of food, so don't say "oh well the alcohol cooked out when I boiled it", cause it didn't. In addition to people in recovery there are those who must avoid alcohol due to medications they take---you can kill people when you do not label properly.

Please note that grape juice is available for communion at 8:45 and 11.

At the most recent General Convention it was resolved that those studying for ministry be educated about addictive illness and its about time although General and several other seminaries have been offering short term courses

The good news is that there is help available from many sources. We are charged with helping those who "would see Jesus" but cannot. We can be the difference between tragedy and a miracle of restoration of individuals and families.

We are called to see Jesus—for as it is said, and I paraphrase a bit, if you cannot find Jesus in beggar on the street, or in this case, those suffering from this disease, you will not find him in the chalice. We are called to BE Jesus' hands and compassion to all who suffer. We like the Son of Man are called to serve, not to be served.

In the words of my friend The Rev. Deacon Jan Brown, president of Faces and Voices of Recovery "Let each of us now take our place as faithful witnesses and stewards of recovery in these church walls and out into the streets of the world. We have gifts of love and service to share with all those we meet. We must not let up---for ourselves, for the church and for the still sick and suffering-for we too, much like Jesus, are called to heal the sick."

Amen

