

Love

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[0 : 0 0] Thank you again so much for having me. And if you weren't here last week, I spoke about the topic of hope. And particularly, as Steve said, hope through my own story. I'm not going to talk about myself so much today, so you can have a break from that.

But my thesis of Christianity is that hope is actually found very often through suffering, which is an incredible reframe on this topic of mental illness. That the gospel is not stoicism.

Our message is not, there's no pain here. The message of the gospel is absolutely there is pain. We have a whole category of lament in the Bible.

And in the midst of that pain, you can find true hope that does not put you to shame. And with that, one of my umbrella arguments, I suppose, to you last week was that I don't believe in pitting psychology against theology.

But rather, if we try to do psychology without theology, we're going to miss a vital part of what it is to be made in the image of God. And so last week was broadly aimed at asking the question, what if it's me who's suffering?

[1 : 0 9] And as Steve said, this week's frame as we zoom out is, what if it's somebody who I love? What if it's somebody in this church? What if it's somebody in my life? How do church communities respond to this increasingly common issue?

And at the risk of just a little bit of shameless self-promotion about me for a moment, this talk is in many ways the marriage of two books that I have written. One on the topic of mental health called Down Not Out, and the other one which is actually coming out in about six weeks called Here to Love, recapturing the centrality of Jesus' greatest command.

And I'll talk a little bit about that in a moment. Now when I told people about Down Not Out in 2017, finding a mainstream publisher, the very common question you get is, how did you get a book deal?

I've heard it's really hard, and it is. I'd submitted many book proposals over the years, and I knew what a rejection letter looked like. But I knew that when I approached the good book company in the UK, it wasn't an automatic yes, but it also wasn't a no.

And so I dove a little bit deeper and tried to just make my foot go through that door. And of course, the God answer is that it was God's will that I got a book deal.

[2 : 2 4] But the human answer is, I refer to a lady by the name of Alison Mitchell. Alison is one of the senior editors with the Good Book Company. And the reason that she was intrigued by my proposition is that she, like me, had endured a long-term mental health condition.

In fact, I would say hers was far worse than mine. She had a medical resistance to any sort of medical intervention, which meant that it was just such a long journey, and it's still ongoing for her.

When my book got published in 2017, Alison wrote a blog post that went with it called When Depression Makes Church So Hard.

Now, Alison is a beautiful, beautiful woman of God. She loves the Lord with all of her heart. But she has this mental health condition, and it gets very messy in terms of what church looks like for her.

Alison lives in London, and she takes the tube to church, and she told me that sometimes she'll get in the tube, she'll rise up the stairs to where her church is, and she'll look at the church, and she'll shake her head, turn around, go straight back down in the tube back home.

[3 : 34] Some weeks, not every week. And yet she loves Jesus. And she tells this story about an Easter Sunday service that I think is very, very profound.

What you hear in Alison is a wrestle. She loves God, as I said. She loves her community. And yet, there's this other thing going on in her mind sometimes.

And this is what she says in the blog article. She probably thought I was very rude. She sat next to me on Easter Sunday morning, smiled and asked how I was.

But I just nodded my head and looked away. She didn't try again. What she didn't know was how hard I'd battled to get to church. Now, I was just barely managing to stay in my seat and not burst into tears.

Every muscle was straining, desperate to flee. And yet part of me wanted to be there. I was glad to be in my own church for Easter and to join with my church family in singing the Lord's praises.

[4 : 36] This is what depression can do to a Christian. Having struggled with severe depressive illness for over 12 years, which is now about 20 years, I can tell you that I never, and she emphasizes the word again, never want to go to church on a Sunday morning.

It is an exhausting battle every single time, and I don't always make it. Getting through the door is an achievement, but the battle isn't yet over. Where can I sit? Is there anyone safe to sit with?

Do I have an exit strategy so that I can leave, if needed, without climbing over people or causing a distraction? Will I be able to sing, or would the words tumble out as sobs instead?

Am I able to lift my head high enough to see the words on the screen, or will my depressed hunch mean my head stays resolutely down? And what if the pastor says something like, go and talk to the person next to you while the children are going out?

At that point, a shaft of dread strikes my heart. Even the end of the service is hard. How quickly can I leave without looking rude? Will the noise of so many people talking at once trigger a panic attack?

[5 : 46] Can I even lift my head high enough to smile at someone as I scuttle out? And if not, will they think again how rude and abrupt I am? I once described my own experience like this.

My church was like a colorful ocean liner, sailing full steam ahead, but I had fallen overboard, and was drowning in a monochrome sea as they sailed away without me.

Thankfully, not every depressive finds church as hard as this. It's not even true for me every Sunday. Sometimes I manage a brief chat at the end, or to pray with someone before I go.

When the depression is less severe, I can lift my head and sing with enthusiasm. I guess that's part of what makes it hard for my church family. They don't know which Allison is going to turn up.

There's a lot there, but I don't know about you, but when I read Allison's article, and I'm someone who has always found church a refuge.

[6 : 45] I'm an extrovert. And so even if I've had a rough week, church is actually good for my soul. But for her, it's a very different story, which makes it a deeply confusing situation for a community of believers.

How do we respond? It's confusing for Allison. It's going to be confusing for those who are not Allison. Which is why before we ask, what do we do about this issue in our church?

And I will hopefully give you some thoughts on that towards the end. I want to zoom above the what and look at the how. Because before we respond to Allison, or to Chris, or anybody else, each room has a different manifestation of certain mental dysfunction, we need an umbrella principle.

And I believe that that umbrella principle is love. Love is the principle, not just of mental health care, but of all of life.

In Matthew chapter 22, Jesus famously says when he's asked what the greatest commandment is, to love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.

[7 : 55] This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it. Love your neighbor as yourself. Those are famous words.

When I ask Christians what the greatest commandment is, very interestingly, often they forget the as yourself bit at the end. That's a different sermon, but just I'll give you that little seed to think about.

But in my own journey, and as I wrote this second book that's about to come out, it was the next words that stopped me in my tracks. Verse 40 of Matthew chapter 22.

All the law and the prophets hang on these two commandments. All the law and all the prophets. What I think Jesus is saying here is that love is not the greatest commandment because it's better than all of the others.

He's saying that love is the greatest commandment because it is all of the others. That is to say, if you are doing your faith without love, you're kind of missing the point.

[8 : 57] And if you're like the Pharisee, you know everything, but you're doing it without love. Love is crucial. In fact, it's indispensable.

But here's the challenge. Loving a friend who has just gotten engaged is very different to loving a friend who has just lost a mother or a father.

What does love look like? It might be the umbrella principle, but how do we apply it? And I want to say that we have to apply it first by looking at God's love for us.

One of the things I said last week is that in order to move forward, and even to stay in the present and to believe that God is still with us, we have to look at his past faithfulness. Grounding ourselves in everything God has already done is a powerful mental and spiritual discipline.

And I said last week in Romans 5 verse 8 that God demonstrates his own love for us in this. While we were still sinners, Christ died for us.

[10 : 03] And I am going to get to Psalm 103 and Romans 12 in a minute, the readings that we had. But before I do, I just want to hone in on one other passage that I just find some of the most beautiful words of Scripture.

What does it mean that Christ has died for us? What does the response to that look like? And Hebrews 4 says something very, very powerful to us. Therefore, since we have a great high priest who has ascended into heaven, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold firmly to the faith we profess.

For we do not have a high priest who is unable to empathize with our weaknesses. What does it mean that God demonstrated his own love for us?

It means that when God sees our suffering, he doesn't just say, oh, I've read about that in a textbook. I've heard that's hard. He says, I know.

I know pain. I died on a cross. And a father says, I know I turned my face away from my son. He is able to empathize with our weaknesses.

[11 : 18] I find those some of the most beautiful words of Scripture. That when we cry out, even sometimes without words, he says, I know. And so we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need.

And just as we receive mercy and grace from God, the more we can reflect that same mercy and grace to others, we reflect God's love in our church communities.

And while there are many, many passages I can use to point to God's love, I want to go back to that Psalm 103, that first reading. Because King David, as he opens, begins by praising God.

And look what he does again. What we saw last week. He starts by looking at the past. Praise the Lord, my soul, or my inmost being. Praise his holy name.

Praise the Lord, my soul, and forget not all his benefits. The reason we praise God, the reason we love God, the reason we love our neighbor, is we remember the benefits we have received from God.

[12 : 23] That is our primary motivation. And what I love in Psalm 103, and if you don't have it open, I'd really encourage you to have it, because I'm going to move through it very quickly.

And I just want you to, I guess, test what I'm saying. What we see in Psalm 103 is a God who is spectacularly powerful and spectacularly loving.

And that's also what we see in that moment of Christ on the cross. Ultimate love on Good Friday. Ultimate power on Easter Sunday. And I love that, because so often in the world, we either have one or the other.

We have very powerful people who seem to be lacking in love, or we have very loving people who seem to have no sort of platform to show that love. It's not always the case, but rarely is it both in one person.

And in God, we see the perfection of both, love and power. Psalm 103, verse 3. He forgives sins.

[13 : 28] He heals diseases. He redeems life from the pit in order to crown us with love and compassion, to satisfy desires, to work justice, and righteous for the oppressed.

In verse 19, His kingdom rules over all. A God who the angels and even the stars themselves would consider worthy of their allegiance.

This is, to use an overused word in the English language, an awesome God. A God who demands our awe, our fear, our reverence, our whole heart.

But here's the thing that gets me about Psalm 103. If we see that God is love, and the greatest of the commands is love, Psalm 103 shows us that it's not just God's quality, it's not just who He is, it's also a comment about the quantity of that love.

And I just want to pause there for a moment in our church communities. Love is not just the quality, but it's also about the quantity, and I'll come to that in a moment.

[14 : 42] Verse 8, King David in his poeticism tells us that not only David, sorry, not only that God is compassionate and gracious, but it's also that He's slow to anger.

He's abounding in love. Verse 11, not only does the Lord love those who fear Him, that's a qualitative statement, He loves them as high as the heavens are above the earth.

Quantity. Verse 12, not only has He removed our transgressions from us, He has removed them as far as the east is from the west. Verse 17, His love does not just last, it lasts from everlasting to everlasting.

Verse 22, not only does the Lord work, He works everywhere in His dominion. This is a God of unending power and abundant love.

And these are the benefits that King David is talking about in verse 2, that we are called not to forget. So what's all of this got to do with mental health?

[15 : 52] We'll come there in a moment. But for now, Romans 12, we see in the New Testament that God's love is confirmed in Jesus Christ.

Verse 1, I urge you, brothers and sisters, again, look, He goes to the past in view of God's mercy, in view of the God of the Old Testament and in view of the God of the New Testament.

What do we do? We offer our bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God. This is your true and proper worship. And so here, we begin to pivot from the vertical.

What has God done for us into the horizontal? How do we respond to one another? Paul begins to give us the answer that we offer our bodies as a living sacrifice.

Why? In view of God's mercy. As King David would put it, to forget not the Lord's benefits. And so it's not only the quality of God's love that drives us to compassion.

[16 : 54] It's not just that He loves us so that we love others. It's the extent, it's the extra mile that we will never fully be able to replicate, of course. But the more we can think about love in quality and quantity, the more we reflect the love of God in our churches.

And why am I talking about quantity so much? I think quantity is a key issue we need to think about because it's probably the thing in the mental health landscape I think is missing the most.

Not just in our churches but in our society. What am I talking about? I think very often the way we talk about mental illness is we describe it as an acute illness when actually it's a chronic illness for the most part.

You probably have heard this statement that in an effort to destigmatize mental illness we say to people it's okay to get help and it is. But the way we frame that is we say well just like you'd go to a doctor for a broken leg you should be okay to go to a doctor if you're struggling with depression or anxiety.

It's a beautiful sentiment but it's also flawed and I gently want to push back on it because what we're doing is we're comparing what is for the most part an acute illness, a broken leg that has a six to eight week recovery and you put it in a plaster and generally it goes well we are comparing that to a vastly different story and if we subliminally expect our loved ones just to get better with one tablet and a few psychologist sessions then we've probably got mismatched expectations and if we have mismatched expectations then we're probably not going to love very well.

[18 : 41] In 2012 Harvard University developed a new technology called magnetic resonance scanning. This is what it looked like. This is a real brain and it was designed to show the different neural pathways that would go on and just as an aside I have to stand up for God for a moment and say I can't be an atheist when I look at that but that's not my point.

My point is this that's more complicated than a leg bone and you don't have to be a scientist to understand that. It's complex. This is the biology behind Alison's comments about church on Sunday.

When something goes awry here it's a very very difficult journey to work out what's going on. We may not actually fully know why with some people this side of eternity.

Alison doesn't know why she's medically resistant. She just knows that she is because she's tried. My point is that the journey of mental illness is seldom short and if you're not a science person let me show you one more diagram that was shown to me.

This probably speaks more my language. This is a diagram I was shown as I was beginning to leave hospital as the outpatient program and it was designed to show us what to expect as we left.

[20 : 03] This was shown actually as the goal of good mental health recovery. And as you can see very clearly it's still a journey of ups and downs. And as a church this is what you should expect from people in your church.

And this is why it's important to consider the quantity of love and the chronic nature of the illness. Because it's very tempting to look at just one of those peaks and troughs and take that sample size and formulate some sort of truth.

It's easy for us to do it within ourselves. It's very easy to use as what psychologists would say that we would catastrophize certain situations.

We would look at one of those valleys and think oh my goodness I'm back at square one. But what we want to see within ourselves and within our communities is that upwards trajectory over a longer period of time.

which is why I'm talking so much about quantity. It's a long game. Slow and steady in my experience really does win the race in good mental health care.

[21 : 12] Now granted there will be some acute situations. Sometimes when somebody is in desperate need it's a triple zero phone call to a hospital. But outside of those very immediate pressing situations where there is danger at hand the broad picture of good mental health care is a long game.

Romans 12 confirms this for us because it asks us how are we to love one another in view of God's mercy? In verse 12 we see it.

We are to be joyful in hope patient in affliction faithful in prayer. This is how we are to use our gifts in the church. that Paul has been speaking about earlier in the chapter.

And I can't think of a better model of care for mental illness. To be joyful in hope to recognise there is hope to be patient and to be prayerful.

And in particular I want to hone in on that word patience again. If you know your Bibles 1 Corinthians 13 love is patient.

[22 : 28] I distinctly remember in hospital feeling like I wasn't worth being loved. Not only was I unloved but I was unlovable. And this is one of the common thoughts or the common litmus tests for someone wrestling with depression this feeling of unlovability.

what you crave most of all when the chips are down is unconditional love. That someone still values you when you find it near impossible to value yourself.

And the gospel is a balm to that crisis because it reminds us that God's love for us is patient. He stands with us. And the flip side of that is the hurt of condition.

love. For someone to come to you and for you to think again that they are just six weeks away from recovery and then when they don't recover you put them in the too hard basket.

I'm actually going to say something a little bit punchy here and you can disagree with me if you want. But in my experience I would almost prefer someone not to enter into my mess at all than enter into it and then leave when I get too hard.

[23 : 44] It just reinforces this narrative of unlovability. And I would gently but somewhat firmly say what if God had treated you like that? God's impatience for our sin does not end in abandonment.

God's impatience for sin ends in the blood of his son. Without patience we would be lost. The Lord is slow to anger, abounding in love.

Again, slow and steady wins the race. And so as we wrap up let me provide what I hope to be some very practical and helpful steps as to what this might look like in practice for you as a church community.

Here are just three thoughts. Number one, you need love as well. Carers need care. because if this call is true and if you agree with it, the challenge is you realise it's going to cost something of you as well.

There is a self-sacrifice involved with this picture. When I left hospital one of the first things my wife had to do was go and see a psychologist herself and that was the right thing because it had taken a toll on her as well.

[25 : 05] Find someone external. external. Find someone external to the situation and preferably someone external to the person you're caring for if you can to care for you too.

Again, it can be a professional or it can be a friend but being needed, I've learned as a pastor, is a little bit addictive sometimes. Being the carer carries with it an identity but again, love your neighbour as yourself.

It's okay to receive care as well. You're going to need it if you're going to play the long game. And I also just want to say something very, very important about love. And I want you to hear this very clearly.

When Jesus calls us to love our neighbour with all of our heart and with all of our soul and with all of our mind and with all of our strength, I think he's doing two things. The first thing he's doing and the thing I'm advocating for here is he's giving us the goal for life itself.

To love well because God has loved us. But I think he's doing something else as well. He's revealing a gap. Because the question becomes who can love with all of their heart and with all of their soul and with all of their mind and with all of their strength?

[26 : 20] Only Christ. And so the reason I'm saying this is you are not going to love perfectly and God knows that. He makes up for that gap in Jesus Christ and yet we still hold on to the goal.

The absoluteness of the call to love is the aspiration and the thing we remember that we run to Christ when we get it wrong which we will. Again if I come back to that Hebrews 4 passage even though God can empathize with our weaknesses there is one key difference.

we have one who has been tempted in every way just as we are yet he did not sin. And so remember that as you love you're going to need God's love for you as well because you're not going to perfect that love in somebody else.

And yet we still hold on to that aspiration. There are actually a number of services professional services for carers as well. I only learned this a few years ago but Lifeline is actually available to call not just if you're in a bad way yourself but you actually need a bit of support as you care for someone who's in a bad way.

So you can call Lifeline for that. There are online resources like Beyond Blue, the Black Dog Institute and of course there is professional help if you need that support too.

[27 : 44] So my point number one is you need love as well please don't forget that. You need it in order to play the long game that I'm advocating for. Number two, there is a time to listen and a time to speak.

I say this because I've seen both ends of the pendulum. Some people come in like a bull in a china shop and just goes, here's what I think is going on. Have you thought about this? Have you thought about this? Slow down.

Listen. But also, some of us tend to listen and nod and smile and not say anything at all. And so I would ask you, are you more of a talker, which in my experience most of us probably are, or are you a listener?

Consider your own starting point because I'm saying there's a time for both. We need to listen quickly in order to understand deeply, but also if we really do love someone and we see them going into destructive paths, love actually does look like saying something sometimes, but always with a gracious tone.

If we see someone heading to self destruction and all we do is nod and smile, we've got to ask whether that's true love. Sometimes a gracious word is what's needed, but we have to do it slowly, grounded in listening and understanding.

[29 : 06] And my third and final point, somewhat related to the first, recognize your limitations. Know that our government has put significant funding into mental health care. If you don't know, you can access through your GP, very often a mental health care plan, which means that you get subsidized sessions and therapies, psychologists, because no single one of us can do everything.

But here's why churches are beautiful. A church can do what a psychologist can't, and a psychologist can do what a church can't. And so the more, as I said last week, we can handle this from every angle, the better our recovery options become.

Because churches are here to love and walk side by side for the long term. That is a beautiful piece of the puzzle that is so often missing in our society. And it's why we've created Life to the Full that Steve talked about.

I've been doing these talks for many years, but I just love that we're able to put it into practice now. We have professionals who can help, professionals who are coming from a Christian worldview.

We have an amazing team that God has raised up, and this has been part of the evidence that he has been in this journey from the very start. And so if you do need help, whether you are the one struggling or you're the one caring, we would love to support you in that journey.

[30 : 28] And so my final point, which I hope and pray has been helpful, is this, that whether you're living with mental illness or whether you're caring for someone with mental illness, I would encourage you to see that your identity is not in the illness, that your identity is not in your performance, but it's actually the identity that you have in God, no matter who you are and in whatever circumstance you find yourself in.

From 1 John chapter 3, this is my prayer for each of us, that we would know this more and more, that we would see what great love the Father has lavished on us, that we should be called children of God, and that is what we are.

Father God, we thank you that we are children. We're not identified by our illnesses, first and foremost.

We are identified by your love for us, that we saw in the Psalms, is not just a quality that you exhibit, but is infinitely quantitative as well.

Lord, in our own imperfect ways, and we pray that we would run to your throne of grace when we don't get it right. But in our own imperfect ways, we would pursue this more and more each day. I pray for St. Paul's that they would continually work out what this looks like in practice, that they would be willing to make the sacrificial move to play the long game with one another, knowing that this does cost something of ourselves.

[31 : 59] And as this community works out how to do that sustainably, and how to love their neighbour as themselves, help each person in this church to get the support that they need as they walk with others.

And ultimately, Lord, we pray that this would be a community that is flourishing in what our world so often lacks, which is love, compassion, mercy, tenderness.

May this be a safe place for the hurting. And again, Lord, may those who are caring for the hurting get care themselves. ourselves. Thank you that in love, you give us the goal, and you also reveal the gap that only Christ can fulfil, that you are able to empathise with our weaknesses, and yet you are not like us, because even though you were tempted, you did not sin.

And so thank you that because of that, we are able to approach your throne of grace with confidence, so that we can find mercy and receive grace to help us in our time of need.

So Father God, hear our prayers, see our hearts, and we pray that you would give us wisdom to know what to do with our hands and feet. Amen.

[33 : 19] Thank you, Chris. I'm going to continue to pray and invite the music team to come on up and be ready to sing. Gracious God, you created a good and perfect world, and how much it must grieve you, the destruction of what you have made good has been so destroyed by human sin.

As we live in this world of suffering, the grief that we experience grieves you. Your heart is bound to ours. You're a God of infinite compassion.

And as we've heard right at the beginning of this service from Psalm 34, you are the God who is close to the brokenhearted. You are the one who saves those who are crushed in spirit.

You're a God who's not distant or absent. You're not just a mere force. You're not detached or unaffected or unmoved by our condition. You draw near. You came.

You, the author of life, the author of history, took on our nature and entered right into your very creation. You came to us. You came to the brokenhearted, the crushed, the lost, the weary, the sinners, the sufferers.

[34 : 37] Thank you, Jesus. Thank you for leaving behind the perfection and the wholeness and the joy of life in heaven with the Father and the Spirit and coming to us.

You descended not just into human form but even further as you went to death for us. the author of life dying on a cross so that we might live.

You were treated as if you were a sinner. You carried to the cross all the evil and the carnage and the sin of human history. You, the innocent one, suffered condemnation for us.

You chose for the just wrath of God to be poured out on you. And on the cross, you cried out the scream of dereliction, the scream of abandonment, loss, and isolation from everything that is good and lovely.

You descended into complete darkness of death all alone that we might be brought into the light of life of eternal relationship with you, our God. Lord Jesus, you have gone deeper into the depths of darkness and loneliness than anyone could ever imagine.

[35 : 58] Gracious God, you journeyed into that together. and so we ask you on behalf of sufferers and the carers of sufferers, we turn to you that they might find hope in you and we commend to your faithful love those who are crying from the depths of darkness now.

Holy Spirit, when scorn and shame and despair, besiege when the clouds, the dark clouds of depression and anxiety and shame descend, and hope is veiled in grief, bring sufferers and sinners to the embrace of the wounded hands of Jesus.

Restless with grief and fear and distress and hopelessness, Lord Jesus, you call us to come. you are gentle and lowly and call all who are weary and loaded with burdens to find rest in you and be lifted to the gospel of hope.

And so Holy Spirit, we would ask that you would free us from everything that keeps us from hearing that call to come. In the darkness of unknowing, when all else seems lost, when your love seems so absent, draw us into the heart of God to find refuge and rest and the certain hope of the dawn of forgiveness and redemption and renewal.

How generous is your goodness, how great is your salvation, how faithful is your love. It is this love that you have called your church to display to all people.

[37 : 46] As you have loved us, so you called us to love one another. And so in a world of rage and suffering and pain, Holy Spirit, empower us and shape us and convict us to be a church that displays the love of Christ and especially to descend to the place of weeping with those who are weeping.

Give us patience and grace and steadfastness to carry each other's burdens, that we might be a community of refuge for sinners and sufferers alike, a community devoted to one another in love, joyful in hope, patient in affliction, and faithful in prayer.

Gracious and most merciful Father God, we pray therefore as well for those who work in mental health care in our city. We ask that you provide them with wisdom and skill and compassion and patience as they engage with patience.

All individual lives made in your image for your glory. May they treat each individual as precious in your sight, worthy of respect and dignity.

Give them discernment and clarity in diagnosing and treating. We ask God that you would sustain them through the secondary trauma that they come from seeing others suffer and the carrying of those burdens.

[39 : 12] Provide them with peace and space to care for themselves. A medical system that equips and supports them and resources them. a community to shoulder the burdens in order that they might have the healthy frame of mind to care for others.

We would ask that you would use them to be transformative agents in the lives of the distressed and the suffering to bring about healing and hope to them and their carers. We pray for your intervention as well, Lord, in the public health system in this state that have seen so many crucial mental health care workers leave.

We pray for these issues, whatever they are, to be resolved through adequate resourcing. We pray for your protection over sufferers not able to access the care that they had even months ago when it is particularly needed.

And so, Lord, we ask that you would have mercy on us. Mercy on all who are afflicted in mind and heart. Because your heart is bound to ours. Amen.

Amen.