

Date: Thursday, October 16, 1997 10:07:11 PM
From: HTHALLJR
Subj: Alex is home.

Dear Family and friends,

Alex has been given a medical release from his mission and is home. The diagnosis is a mental illness known as "obsessive-compulsive disorder". His stake president told me that he felt that it would be better to release him rather than to place him under all the restrictions of mission rules during a medical treatment of unknown duration. That is about all I know. I know a little about the disorder, and that there are medications that can help.

Just the week before learning of Alex's condition I was pondering my life-long struggles with depression, for which I have only recently finally found effective medication, and I wrote myself an essay about the nature of mental illness. I want to share with you here just a few of my conclusions:

Note carefully the words of the great prophet-king Benjamin: "I have not commanded you to come up hither that ye should fear me, or that ye should think that I of myself am more than a mortal man. But I am like as yourselves, subject to all manner of infirmities in body and mind" (Mosiah 2:10-11, emphasis mine). Benjamin clearly taught that mortality involves both physical and mental disease and humbly acknowledged his own susceptibility to mental infirmities.

I believe that during his life, Jesus himself suffered all manner of physical afflictions, and that it was entirely possible that he also suffered at some time from mental illness. Because of the physical and mental demands placed upon him during the "tithe" of his life, when the Father sent him forth on his mission to establish his Church, I personally believe that most of his personal experience with illness came prior to his three-year mission. Of course, his ultimate suffering came in Gethsemane and Golgotha.

Regarding the affliction of depression, Isaiah testified, and Abinadi reaffirmed: "He is despised and rejected of men: a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief; and we hid as it were our faces from him; he was despised, and we esteemed him not. Surely he has borne our griefs, and carried our sorrows; yet we did esteem him stricken, smitten of

God, and afflicted." (Isaiah 53:3-4; Mosiah 14:3-4, emphasis mine.)

I do not believe that mental illness in any way is the result of sin. It is just one of the trials of mortality, a condition of this existence which some are called on to suffer, for reasons known only to our Heavenly Father. Nevertheless, many who suffer mental illness also suffer much

misunderstanding from others. There is a strong cultural disposition, entirely contrary to all the teachings of the scriptures and the prophets, to attribute mental and even physical suffering to sin. We have still not learned the lesson of Job. Even his disciples asked Jesus, concerning a man born blind: "Who did sin, this man, or his parents, that he was born blind? Jesus answered, Neither hath this man sinned, nor his parents: but that the works of God should be made manifest in him." (John 9:2-3) Then he healed him.

I believe there is also a wide-spread misunderstanding of the New Testament accounts of Jesus casting out devils. I believe that many, and perhaps most of these healings were simply His curing of mental illness. The model for mental illness at that time (and indeed, also in the Book of Mormon and in latter-day Puritan society) was that of demonic possession. I believe that Jesus, the Creator, who has a perfect understanding of all truth, was not sent to disseminate scientific knowledge. Rather than try to completely overthrow the culture and introduce knowledge for which there was simply no basis for understanding, he simply worked with what he had. If someone believed they were possessed by a devil, he didn't try to argue them out of their viewpoint -- he simply cast out the devil. Certainly the little children from whom he "cast out devils" were not capable of sin. I believe that if the model for mental illness had been excess phlogiston, he would have released the phlogiston. I am confident that within a few decades, even our present understanding of mental illness will appear superstitious and primitive. But were Jesus here today, he might well, in his healing of the mentally ill, command the healing in terms of our present model and our working vocabulary.

I do not believe that mental illness is the fault of the one afflicted. Nor is it the fault of anyone else. It is just part of life. It is true that we receive from our parents a genetic predisposition to physical and mental illness, and that our life experiences and our actions can compound both physical and mental problems. As with physical illness, diet, exercise, medical treatment, and Priesthood administration can all influence the outcome, but they cannot always completely prevent nor completely cure.

Sometimes the Lord just lets us suffer these things for our experience, for a greater good which only He perfectly understands. I believe that mental and physical illness are on the same spiritual footing.

I am thankful to live in this day, when we are beginning to understand the organic, physiological causes of mental illness. I pray that in addition

to receiving the ministrations of the Spirit, that Alex will be led to the best professional help and receive the proper medications.

Alma the younger, referring again to the words of Isaiah and Abinadi (who had converted Alma the elder) testified: "And he shall go forth, suffering pains and afflictions and temptations of every kind; and this that the word might be fulfilled which saith he will take upon him the pains and the sickness of his people. And he will take upon him death, that he may loose the bands of death which bind his people; and he will take upon him their infirmities, that his bowels may be filled with mercy, according to the flesh, that he may know according to the flesh how to succor his people according to their infirmities." (Alma 7:11-12, emphasis mine).

Whether or not Jesus in fact suffered mental illness during his life, he perfectly understands it and has intimately experienced its most agonizing effects. Elder Maxwell, in his thrilling talk in General Conference, testified that during his infinite atonement Jesus personally suffered the effects of all physical and spiritual afflictions. He underwent this incredible suffering, which only a God could endure without instantly suffering death, that he might be able to succor us according to the flesh.

I know that our Savior understands us perfectly and has born all our sorrow, all our pain. As we experience the trials of physical and mental illness and do our best to endure them, we will be brought closer to our Savior. I pray with all my heart that He might comfort and heal Alex, and I solicit also your faith and prayers in his behalf.

Love,

Tracy Jr.

[Sent via blind CC to Mom, Dad, all my siblings, HT and Mary, and several friends.]