

We Could Have Saved Poor Audrey: A Sermon on Suicide

11/7/82

This sermon begins long ago and far away, I think it was in Boston, although it might have been in Buffalo. It could have been in any of the major cities of the earth: or out in any of the pleasant country places, in the quiet rural portions of the planet. It could have happened on some fine and fancy sequestered lane or square or private circle. It might have been the poorest derelict, on any of our darkened dingy streets or alleys on the bowery. It might have been in the crowded hallway of a ghetto tenement walkup down in the city center. Yet, it could have been out on the tree-lined suburban ways, where the wealthy only go to rest and eat and drink at night. It could have been in the janitor's tiny, dusty office in the basement of the building, yet it might have happened in the penthouse executive suite fifty-seven stories up. It might have been the chairman of the board, as not so very long ago you read it was, or it could have been the bored fourteenth assistant at the old Poughkeepsie office in the boondocks of the land.

It might have been an aging man or woman, nearing natural end, depressed and in declining health: or a strong, robust young man with vigor set to last six decades longer in the race to win it all. It could have been the mother of four children (3 of them 13 or less), or the fourteenth child of someone's other family. It might have been a black or white or brown or red or yellow person. It might have been in India, Tokyo, Milan or old Madrid. It could have happened in Constantinople, Istanbul, or in the current topsy-turvy of Iran, Iraq or Italy. It might have been a Christian, or possibly a Jew, probably less a Muslim, probably more a Shinto (indigenous people of Japan). It could have been a non-believer in any or all of the major faiths we celebrate, as best.

It might have been a college student, failing all his courses, or another college student passing all of hers, and passing as the life of each and every party on the campus - alcohol or drugs were probably involved. It might have (horrors) been a little nine or ten year old American. How sad. It could have been in ancient Rome, in classic Greece, or on a vaunted mountain back in pre-Biblical Mesopotamia. It could have been a monk in the darkened Middle Ages, or a wide-eyed reforming liberal of the Great Enlightenment...it might have been a slave back in old Virginia or the master who had charge of several dozen different slaves. It often has been a soldier afraid to go to battle, or lovers when the battle's finally through. It might have been a myriad of possibilities in a thousand places, a thousand years or more ago. It could have been almost anyone, anytime, almost anywhere at all.

As it was, it was not that long ago and not so far away, I think it was in Boston, I'd guess about a decade back. I know it was a teen-aged girl named Audrey (Tomlinson, we'll say).

Oh, the horror of it all. No one knew, or no one said they knew that she was suffering so: "One of the nicest girls I ever met," her teacher said, "Never caused us trouble." Her Reverend said she was so well behaved. Her mother said not one wee word: her father said it was a shame. Her little brother cried. Her friends stammered on and on and on. They all said she had been a trifle quieter (though many said they did not even notice that). A few said she seemed depressed or down over the loss of a friendship, which she had lost a month before (but some said that was a nonsense – "She had more friends than anyone around"). Three students said that she seemed a little lonelier. Her best friend noticed other signs and signals. But no one said the news was anything but shocking, and a horribly sad and awful surprising tragedy. Poor Audrey, alone, and I would guess afraid and lonely, and I would guess, a lot of other things, one night in the middle of the loveliest April evening, anyone had ever seen. Poor Audrey took her life by self-inflicted wounds. She died, another of those teenage suicide statistics, another for the book of budding human tragedies, another item for the sociologists to study, while her bewildered, and burdened friends tried to cope and go on living, staggering through the dark to fathom the unfathomable depth and mystery of why she did it, and why she did it when she did.

And our sermon topic came a little later in the opening period of transition, when it seemed that light would never come again: one of her friends told her pastor, in words I borrow here, "We could have saved poor Audrey, if we had only known." We could have helped poor Audrey, if we had only known. We could have helped, but could we?

.... A sermon on suicide...

Now, I need to guess, though I have asked just a few of you, what you might want to know about this topic in the name of Jesus Christ. This after all is a Christian sermon, not a secular lecture...and my guess of what you want to know, now becomes our sermon outline. I guess you want to know these things:

- 1) What causes suicide?
- 2) What the Bible says about it...and whether it is ever right...
- 3) How can we prevent it, especially, but not only with the young?

Let's take them one by one.

First, what causes suicide, often a mystery for some...

Here we can but sketch the briefest adumbration: one thing is sure – something or some things cause it for it is surely here. Two million people are alive on earth that have made at least one serious attempt to take their lives. There were 25,000 suicides recorded in the USA last year (1981) but most authorities guess that number is actually higher. Families often do not report it. Many are interrelated to drugs, alcohol and driving; it is difficult to know and sometimes it comes suddenly in

a merciful ending to a long and lingering illness. Each single minute some attempts suicide in the USA (an average of one person dies by suicide every 13.3 minutes – CDC, AAS). Did you know that? Most everyone, one noted doctor guesses, has thought about it or will – sometime in his or her lifetime. No one, no family is immune – 75% of families interviewed said it had touched them directly. Four to five hundred thousand a year make a serious attempt, somewhere in our 50 states, a disproportionate number in the spring. April is the worst month of the year, as T.S. Eliot penned “the cruelest month.” Second, of course, comes in December.

The highest percentage group is in the aging portion of the nation (white aging males are first), 88% by one study who had attempted had had a serious illness. But teen-aged attempts have tripled in the past 10 years; the most notable increase of all is in the ages of 6-11 group. No one knows for sure how many college and teenaged young people attempt it, but we hear and read about it almost every day or two. It now ranks as the third largest cause of death in the age group of 15-24 (following accidents and homicides) a 250% increase in 10 short years. Some other nations have it worse, all around the world, some others have it better.

Why? I am sure you are asking. What causes it? Well, now that’s a question, but I’ll try to answer it in outline...

One, it has always been the case. Through all recorded history, suicide has been an option men have chosen. At times it has been honored, heralded as the kingly way to die in feudal Japan and Ancient Greece. Many of the ancient Romans argued for it, like Seneca, who performed it on himself to find relief from the sadness and the suffering of growing old and dying slowly. It has been touted as a courageous self-conquering event, many in the history of the church, just to escape the sins of the world and go directly to heaven, as their stated motivation.

How awful, the cause, maybe it is not in their power – surely God understands.

Yet, the church has always been against it, especially the Roman Catholic doctrine prohibits the taking of your life and for centuries the penalty for trying and not succeeding was a public execution! Augustine railed against it, as did Aquinas and Charles Moore in what still may be the chief religious study of the topic. Aristotle said it was a sign of cowardice, but men as far apart as David Hume and Old John Donne argued for suicide as a valid option for the living, and Socrates, you all recall took the hemlock dose quite willingly.

My point is that it has always been an issue and it always will. It is here because of life and death; because of the forces deep within us which call for self-destruction, what Freud called *Thanatos*, our drive for death, and escape and release – forever at war with Eros, our force for life and good. As Albert Camus once said, “Ambivalence to the fact of our existence is one of western man’s most persistent characteristics.” That’s all a smidgeon deep.

So, from there, we go on to more practical and current causes of suicide. Often we do not know why, often there is no answer – but there are ranges, or boundaries we might call them into which the answer fits.

There is this impersonal society in which we have to live, the demands and often impossible expectations forced upon us and upon the young. We live in a day of less stable family and emotional supports at a time when stability and support are needed all the more. The failure of our materialistic ways to provide the happiness while promising the more, redeems us less and less. With the bombardment of our media, urging us on to the false trappings of existence with the increased assumption often hidden that violence is the answer to the human problems and predicaments. Our whole escapist culture, our fear of war and worse. Our decreasing discipline and disappointments, all that and more would lie behind the answer.

Usually something specific triggers it, usually there are signs and gestures as doctors call them – not always but often – we could have helped, if not Audrey, then at least we could work to bring a fairer Christian life to the people all around us. We could help more to solve.

This and most other problems of our time, if we only take the time to discover how to do it and what is needed to make the promise of a lovelier, happier, more abundant place come true. Alcohol and drugs are often interrelated and mental struggles usually are as well. Hostility, depression, loss of a relationship, failure to succeed, feelings of worthlessness, anger, anxiety and withdrawal, rejection and guilt are other words we use to label the cause. Usually the suicide victim is depressed and broken for a myriad of reasons. By the time it comes, nothing could have helped.

One final word on cause...some recent studies, as they do with other maladies of the mind, emotions and the soul, seem to be linking suicide with chemical abnormalities in the brain. Don't run from that too soon. One reputable study from Wayne State University, confirmed by the National Institute of Mental Health, suggests that the absence of a particular chemical necessary for the normal function of the personality (imipramine) contributes. Those studied who succeeded in committing suicide had a 1/3 to 1/2 greater deficiency. It could be quite a factor, victims out of conscious control. We know depression is related to chemical imbalances in the brain, it is mind-boggling to think that suicide might also be a malfunction of the system.

Now, second I have guessed you what to know what the Bible says about suicide. Our textbook as Christian people, unlike what you might suspect we begin with what Karl Barth called, "The remarkable fact is that no where does the Bible prohibit the taking of one's life, not explicitly forbidden" is the way the doctor said it.

There are four cases of actual suicide, as we define it, recorded in the Scripture. We define it as the willing rejection and the taking of one's life – not martyrdom, or self sacrifice.

First is the case of Saul (and his unarmed armed bearer) both of whom fell on their own swords when faced with ultimate defeat at the hands of the Philistines in I Samuel 31, is well known. It follows immediately on the murder of Saul's three sons, a contributing fact the sorrow and horror of which are often forgotten. But the first great king of the unified Israel killed himself and his frightened armor-bearer followed him to death. There is no mention of his evil doing, only a slight regret.

A second is in the case of Zimri (I Kings 16:18) so vividly told in I Kings, his suicide followed brief, but turbulent reign over the kingdom of Judah at Tirzah, which began when the drunken Elah, son of Baasha, was murdered by Zimri himself. He then proceeded to kill all the male members of Baasha's house. He had worn the crown for a scant seven days, one week, it says when the Philistines came and Omri, having taken over the Israelite army, went up to Tirzah, surrounded Zimri's city and rather than face his punishment for the evil he had committed – he went into the citadel of the Kings house set fire to it and brought the burning roof down on his own head. A spectacular suicide in process as he perished in the royal palace.

Third, the suicide of Ahithophel, told in II Samuel 17:23, follows the revolt of Absalom against King David his father, where Ahithophel had counseled with Absalom as to how they could snatch the crown away from David. The best-laid plans often go astray – as you know and when his chosen 12,000 men were incapable of defeating the King, and when David did not fall into his trap, Ahitophel, it says, saddled up his ass; went off to his own city, set his house in order (whatever that means), went out and hanged himself and died. A pattern often seen, most successful suicides plan it well.

The case of Judas is the best known of all, even if a trifle more confusing there are two separate stories told in the New Testament as to how Judas took his life. Following the betrayal of Jesus and the remorse, which Judas felt, it says in Matthew (27:5), he threw down his 30 pieces of silver before the chief priests and the elders then went out and hanged himself. They took the money and bought a burial ground for the poor according to Luke in Acts I, it says that Judas bought a field with his pieces of silver and fell head-long in the middle (presumably of a cavern in the field) and was crushed to death.

There is no condemnation of any of these acts of suicide. In fact, with Judas say, and Ahitophel, at least there is the hint that it was a proper end for their betrayal of Jesus Christ, as well as David.

There are a few other references to suicide in the expanded Roman Catholic Bible, when in I Maccabees 6:43, Eleazar exposed himself to certain death, but for the common good and the lone incident of Razias in II Maccabees 14:41.

We also note in Acts 16:27 the incident where Paul prevented a suicide, not presumably because it would have been wrong for the Philippian jailor to have taken his life as required, if his prisoners had escaped, but because they had NOT escaped. The words which Paul uses, however, are an eternal message to the would be suicide victim – “Do not harm yourself,” Paul cried, “for we are all here.”

Not every act of self-destruction in the Bible qualifies as suicide. For while Samson in Judges 16:30 surely kills himself in the great Phoenician Temple as he shoved out the pillars and perished with a multitude of the enemy, it while important to our topic, is a different kind of self-ambulation. And others often, as in the case of Jesus Christ himself, give up their lives to seek and serve a higher will and purpose.

So what then should we say as to what the Bible says about suicide, especially as to a prohibition which we often feel is there? As always the Scripture understands the powers and pressures of the self-destructive force within us all, whether it be guilt, as with Judas; defeat as with Ahitophel; with the need to spare oneself a greater suffering as with Zimri and Saul, or even with the conscious desire to join another revered loved one in death (as with Saul’s armor bearer), the Bible acknowledges the wide range of causes in which most suicides occur.

The prohibition comes from the larger view of what God in Jesus Christ and the Bible are about. The sanctity of life itself is what I am speaking of. It is our human sin which causes suicide, says Dr. Barth, “The flaunting of the faithfulness of God”; we are not lords and masters of our lives. While Christ will surely understand the self-defeating power, which lies behind each attempt at suicide; and while God can surely forgive us for this and every other shortcoming we have, still the respect for life is taught so completely in the Bible that we cannot deny its application to suicidal death. No man ever hates his own flesh Paul says in Ephesians and likens the love of self to Christ’s love for his church. The sixth commandment not to kill can also apply. Life itself has a distinct ethical and eternal content from the moment of creation. Suffering, as revealed essentially in Christ (CF Romans 5:3, 8:18, etc.) has a divine purpose in the world. God’s power to create and recreate again any life that’s fallen or just falling is forever taught and glorified.

Whatever be your circumstances, or hers or his, God is still at work calling you, he or she to more. He can help you find the power to overcome and what’s more, he will.

So then and there we come to the cure...

Lastly, I have guessed you want to know what we can do about it, or more personally, what you can do about it.

- 1) We can affirm life and support all life supporting efforts and movements in the world.
- 2) We must begin to TALK ABOUT IT MORE.

Cancer – it can be researched and cured
Alcoholism – it can be understood
Death itself – can be faced and conquered.

Now, we must break the conspiracy of silence, which surrounds suicide, to gain and share the knowledge, which we have or could have if we worked hard enough to find it.

There are those today who go too far – like EXIT – the organization which prepared a manual how to do it wisely and well.

3) We must learn to recognize the signals of those around us and be open to talk about, to love and listen to what hurt is being handled – people in trouble need less pressure, not more. We need a person-oriented schema to overcome the impersonal forces all around us.

4) We need to teach ourselves, and our children how to cope. Iris Bolton of The Link Counseling Center in Atlanta, GA gives the following tips on coping skills:

- * Develop an individual's self-esteem "internalized intrinsic value"
- * Teach communication skills so a person can release their feelings
- * Teach "positive failure" in a culture based on #1, it is imperative for a child to learn what it is and has gone wrong, can work for good
- * Help individuals to handle grief – suicide often follows loss and inability to deal with it.

Then, as always we need to offer the forgiving, renewing love and life of Jesus Christ, our Lord.

We could have helped poor Audrey, but we didn't and can't now. The past is past, indeed. The question is whether we can help others in the future and the answer is WE CAN. We can be instruments on which each Christian can play his Psalms of Peace...Freud thought he had discovered a new diatonic in Thanatos and Eros; Moses knew it first long, long ago – back in Deuteronomy...God, Himself is speaking:

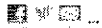
"I have set before you life and death, blessing and curse, mourning and the morning – therefore choose life, that you and your descendants may live!"

Loving the Lord our God and cleaving to him as we reach out into the lives of others, in Jesus Christ our Lord now and evermore.

Amen



SHARE

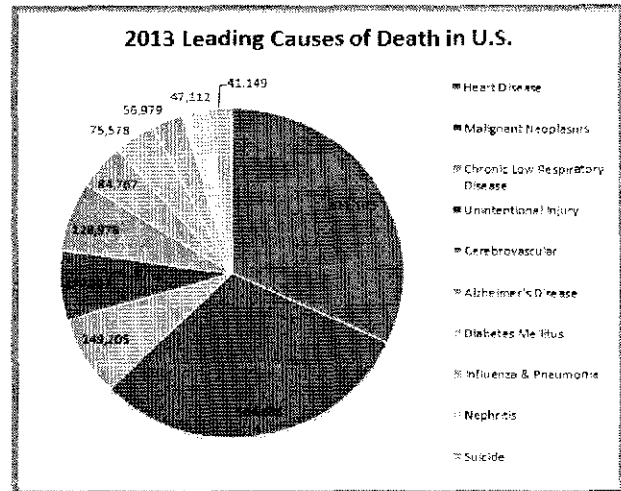


Newsletter Sign-Up

Suicide Facts

SAVE uses the most current data available from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. In 2013, there were 41,149 deaths by suicide in the United States. Suicide is the 10th leading cause of death; homicide ranks 16th. It is the second leading cause of death for 15 - 24 year olds. Click on the chart to the right which shows the Ten Leading Causes of Death in the U.S. in 2013. For more data, you may visit

www.cdc.gov or www.who.int. For more comprehensive data, visit the CDC website's Web-based Injury Statistics Query and Reporting System (WISQARS)



General Statistics

- Suicide is the 10th leading cause of death in the US for all ages. (CDC)
- The suicide rates decreased from 1990-2000 from 12.5 suicides per 100,000 to 10.4 per 100,000. Over the past decade, however, the rate has again increased to 12.1 per 100,000. Every day, approximately 105 Americans die by suicide. (CDC)
- There is one death by suicide in the US every 13 minutes. (CDC)
- Depression affects 20-25% of Americans ages 18+ in a given year. (CDC)
- Suicide takes the lives of over 38,000 Americans every year. (CDC)
- Only half of all Americans experiencing an episode of major depression receive treatment. (NAMI)
- 80% -90% of people that seek treatment for depression are treated successfully using therapy and/or medication. (TAPS study)
- An estimated quarter million people each year become suicide survivors (AAS).
- There is one suicide for every estimated 25 suicide attempts. (CDC)
- There is one suicide for every estimated 4 suicide attempts in the elderly. (CDC)

Gender Disparities

- Suicide among males is 4x's higher than among females. Male deaths represent 79% of all US suicides. (CDC)
- Firearms are the most commonly used method of suicide among males (51%). (CDC)
- Access to firearms is associated with a significantly increased risk of suicide. (NAMI)
- Females are more likely than males to have had suicidal thoughts. (CDC)
- Females experience depression at roughly 2x's the rate of men.(SMH)
- Females attempt suicide 3x's as often as males. (CDC)
- Poisoning is the most common method of suicide for females. (CDC)

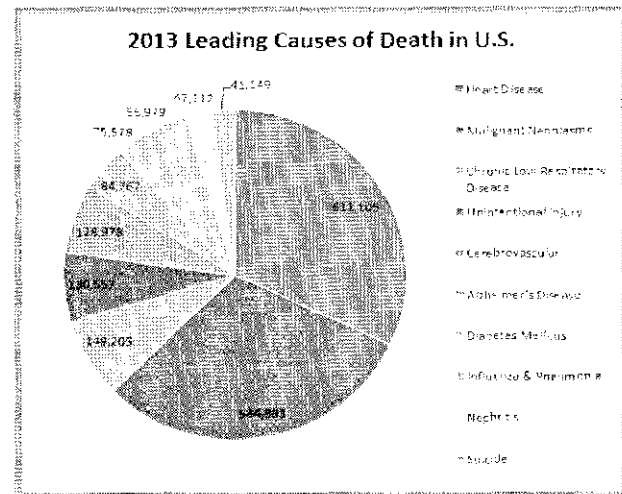
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Age Disparities

- 1 in 100,000 children ages 10 to 14 die by suicide each year. (NIMH)
- 7 in 100,000 youth ages 15 to 19 die by suicide each year. (NIMH)
- 12.7 in 100,000 young adults ages 20-24 die by suicide each year. (NIMH)
- The prevalence of suicidal thoughts, suicidal planning and suicide attempts is significantly higher among adults aged 18-29 than among adults aged 30+. (CDC)
- Suicide is the 2nd leading cause of death for 15 to 24 year old Americans. (CDC)
- Suicide is the 4th leading cause of death for adults ages 18-65. (CDC)
- The highest increase in suicide is in males 50+ (30 per 100,000). (CDC)
- Suicide rates for females are highest among those aged 45-54 (9 per 100,000). (CDC)
- Suicide rates for males are highest among those aged 75+ (36 per 100,000). (CDC)
- Suicide rates among the elderly are highest for those who are divorced or widowed. (SMH)

Racial and Ethnic Disparities

- The highest suicide rates in the US are among Whites, American Indians and Alaska Natives.

Worldwide

- Over 800,000 people die by suicide every year. (WHO)
- There is one death by suicide in the world every 40 seconds. (WHO)
- Suicide is the 3rd leading cause of death in the world for those aged 15-44 years. (WHO)
- Depression is the leading cause of disability worldwide. (WHO)

(Sources: CDC – Center for Disease Control, WHO – World Health Organization, AAS – American Association of Suicidology, NAMI- National Alliance on Mental Illness, NIMH – National Institute of Mental Health, SMH – Screening for Mental Health).

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Pls do not
print (original
sermon) - pls keep
with file.

" We Could Have Saved Poor Audrey :
a Sermon on Suicide"

THIS SERMON BEGINS LONG AGO AND FAR AWAY, I THINK IT WAS IN BOSTON, ALTHOUGH
 IT MIGHT HAVE BEEN IN BUFFALO. IT COULD HAVE BEEN IN ANY OF THE MAJOR CITIES OF THE
~~PLANET~~: OR OUT IN ^{any of the} PLEASANT COUNTRY ^{place} ~~200~~, IN THE QUIET RURAL ^{PORTIONS} PARTS OF THE PLANET.
 IT COULD HAVE HAPPENED ~~UP OR DOWN ANY OF THE~~ ^{ON SOME} FINE AND FANCY LANES OR SQUARES OR ^{sequestered} CIRCLES, ^{private}
~~WHERE THE PROSPEROUS AMONG US LIVE AND ^{live} AND HAVE ^{our} DAILY BEINGS.~~ IT MIGHT
 HAVE BEEN THE POOREST DERELICT, ON ANY OF OUR DARKENED DINGY STREETS OR ALLEYS ~~ON~~
 THE BOWERY, IT MIGHT HAVE BEEN IN THE CROWDED HALLWAY OF A GHETTO TENANTMENT ^{walk-up}
 THE CITY CENTER. ^{yet,} IT COULD HAVE BEEN ^{OUT} ON THE TREELINED SUBURBAN WAYS, WHERE THE WEALTHY
^{Down in} ONLY GO ^{TO REST & EAT & DRINK AT NIGHT.} IT COULD HAVE BEEN IN THE JANITOR'S TINY ^{Dusty} OFFICE IN THE BASEMENT OF
 THE ^{Building} ~~pent~~, YET IT MIGHT HAVE HAPPENED IN THE PENTHOUSE EXECUTIVE SUITE FIFTY SEVEN
 STORIES UP. IT MIGHT HAVE BEEN THE CHAIRMAN OF THE BOARD, AS NOT SO VERY LONG AGO
^{you had} IT WAS, OR IT COULD HAVE ~~BEEN~~ THE BORED FOURTEENTH ASSISTANT ~~AT~~ THE OLD POUGHKEEPSIE
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 IN DECLINING HEALTH: OR ~~TO~~ ^{young} A STRONG ~~young~~ ROBUST ^{MAN} WITH VIGOR ^{SET}
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 THE MOTHER OF FOUR CHILDREN, ^{(3 of them 13 or less) or} ~~THE~~ FOURTEENTH CHILD OF SOME ~~ONE'S~~ OTHER FAMILY.
 IT MIGHT HAVE BEEN A ~~black~~ OF WHITE OR ^{Brown} OR RED OR YELLOW PERSON. IT ^{might} ~~could~~ HAVE
 BEEN IN INDIA, ~~OR~~ TOKYO, ~~OR~~ MILAN OR OLD MADRID. IT COULD HAVE HAPPENED IN ^{Constantinople -} ~~ANCIENT~~
 ISTANBUL, OR IN THE CURRENT TOPSY TURVY OF IRAN, IRAQ, OR ITALY. IT MIGHT HAVE BEEN
 A CHRISTIAN, OR POSSIBLY A JEW, PROBABLY LESS A MUSLIM, PROBABLY MORE A SHINTO. IT
 COULD HAVE BEEN A NON-BELIEVER ^{Any-All} IN ~~ANY~~ OF THE MAJOR FAITHS WE CELEBRATE ^{as Best.}

IT MIGHT HAVE BEEN A COLLEGE STUDENT, FAILING ALL HIS COURSES, OR ANOTHER ^{College}
 student passing all of hers, and passing as the life of each and every party on
^{Alcohol or drugs were probably involved -} THE CAMPUS. IT MIGHT HAVE (HORRORS) BEEN A LITTLE NINE OR TEN YEAR OLD ^{AMERICAN.}
^{How SAD.} IT COULD HAVE BEEN IN ANCIENT ROME, IN CLASSIC ~~GREECE~~ GREECE, OR ON A VAUNTED MOUNTAIN
^{BACK} IN PRE-BIBLICAL MESOPOTAMIA. IT COULD HAVE BEEN A MONK IN THE DARKENED MIDDLE

AGES, OR A WIDE EYED REFORMING LIBERAL OF THE GREAT ENLIGHTENMENT.... IT MIGHT
 HAVE BEEN A SLAVE ^{back in old Virginia -} ~~ON AN OLD SOUTH CAROLINA PLANTATION~~ OR THE MASTER WHO HAD CHARGE
 OF SEVERAL ^{DOZEN DIFFERENT SLAVES} ~~SLAVES~~. IT OFTEN ^{HAS BEEN} ~~WAS~~ A SOLDIER AFRAID TO GO TO ^{BATTLE} ~~BATTLE~~, OR ^{LOVERS} ~~LOVER~~ WHEN
 THE BATTLE ^{FINALLY} ~~WAS~~ THROUGH. IT MIGHT HAVE BEEN A ^{MYRIAD OF POSSIBILITIES} ~~LOT OF THINGS~~ OR PEOPLE IN A
 THOUSAND ^{THOUSAND} ~~MILLION DIFFERENT~~ PLACES, A THOUSAND YEARS ^{OR MORE AGO.} ~~AGO~~ IT COULD HAVE BEEN ALMOST
 ANYONE, ~~ANY~~ ANYTIME, ALMOST ANYWHERE AT ALL.

AS IT WAS, IT WAS NOT THAT LONG AGO AND NOT ^{SO} ~~THAT~~ FAR AWAY, I THINK IT WAS IN BOSTON,
 I'D GUESS ABOUT A DECADE BACK. I KNOW IT WAS A TEEN-AGED GIRL NAMED AUDREY (TOMLINSON,
 WE'LL SAY)

x x x x x

OH, THE HORROR OF IT ALL. NO ONE KNEW, OR NO ONE SAID THEY KNEW THAT SHE
 WAS SUFFERING SO: "ONE OF THE NICEST GIRL I EVER MET", HER TEACHER ^{SAID "Never Caused Us} ~~SAID~~ ^{REMEMBER TROUBLE!} ~~REMEMBER TROUBLE!~~

^{Her} ^{Rememend} SAID SHE WAS SO WELL BEHAVED. HER MOTHER SAID NOT ONE WEE WORD: HER FATHER SAID IT
 WAS A SHAME. ^{Here little brother only child - Her friends STAMMERED on & on & on.} THEY ALL SAID SHE HAD BEEN A TRIFLE QUIETER (THOUGH MANY SAID THEY DID

NOT EVEN NOTICE THAT) A FEW SAID SHE SEEMED DEPRESSED ^{a down} ~~OVER~~ THE LOSS OF A FRIENDSHIP
 WHICH SHE HAD LOST A MONTH BEFORE (^{BUT SOME} ~~SOME~~ SAID THAT WAS ^{NOT} ~~NONSENSE~~, SHE HAD MORE FRIENDS

THAN ANYONE AROUND) ^{A Little} THREE STUDENTS SAID THAT SHE SEEMED LONELIER ~~THAN ANYONE AROUND~~
^{Thought} ^{Her Best Friends Noticed} ~~THAT SHE SEEMED LONELIER~~ ^{OTHER SIGNS & SIGNALS.} ~~THAT SHE SEEMED LONELIER~~
~~THAT SHE SEEMED LONELIER~~ BUT NO ONE SAID THE NEWS WAS ANYTHING BUT SHOCKING, AND A HORRIBLY

SAD AND AWFUL ^{SURPRISING} TRAGEDY. POOR AUDREY, ALONE, AND I WOULD GUESS AFRAID AND LONELY, AND
 I WOULD GUESS, A LOT OF OTHER THINGS, ONE NIGHT IN THE MIDDLE OF THE LOVELIEST APRIL

^{Evening,} ANYONE HAD EVER SEEN, POOR AUDREY TOOK HER LIFE BY SELF-INFLICTED WOUNDS. SHE DIED,
 ANOTHER OF THOSE ^{TEEN AGE} ~~ANOTHER~~ SUICIDE STATISTICS, ANOTHER FOR THE BOOK OF ^{BUBBING} ~~OF~~ HUMAN TRAGEDIES,

ANOTHER ^{ITEM} FOR THE SOCIOLOGISTS TO STUDY, WHILE HER BEWILDERED, ~~AND~~ BURDENED FRIENDS
 AND FAMILY TRIED TO COPE AND GO ON LIVING, STAGGERING THROUGH THE DARK ~~OF~~ TO

UNFATHOM THE UNFATHOMABLE DEPTH AND MYSTERY OF WHY SHE DID IT, AND WHY SHE DID IT
 WHEN SHE DID IT, ~~WHEN SHE DID.~~ ^{when she did.}

AND OUR SERMON TOPIC CAME A LITTLE LATER IN ^{The opening} ~~OUR~~ PERIOD OF ^{TRANSITION,} ~~READJUSTMENT~~ WHEN
 IT SEEMED THAT ~~THE~~ LIGHT WOULD NEVER COME AGAIN: ONE OF HER FRIENDS TOLD HER PASTOR,

IN WORDS I BORROW HERE, "WE COULD HAVE SAVED POOR AUDREY, IF WE HAD ONLY KNOWN."
^{WE COULD HAVE HELPED} ~~WE COULD HAVE SAVED~~ POOR AUDREY, IF WE HAD ONLY KNOWN.

We could have helped - but could we?

... A sermon on Suicide ...

Now I need to guess, though I have asked
not just a few of you, what you might want to know about
this topic in the name of Jesus Christ. This after all
is a Christian sermon, not a secular lecture... & my
guess of what you want to know, now becomes ~~my sermon~~
our sermon outline. I ~~could~~ guess you want to know
Three things ~~sermon~~

First (I) What causes suicide ...

Then (II) What the Bible says about it

~~Whether it is ever right~~
• whether it is ever right

Then (III) How can we prevent it, especially
this - but not only with the young....

Let's take them one by one.

(I) First, What Causes Suicide, ^{often} A Mystery for Science

Here we can but sketch the briefest adumbration: One thing is sure: something or some things ~~caused~~ cause it for it is surely here. 2 million people are alive on earth who have made at least one serious attempt to take their lives. ~~The number per year who succeed in doing so is recorded in secrecy & that statistic is too complex to guess at long.~~ 25,000 suicides were recorded as such in the USA last year. ^{BUT} Most authorities guess twice that number actually do: families often do not report it. Many are interrelated to Drugs & Drinks & Driving, ^{IT IS DIFFICULT TO KNOW} & sometimes in a merciful ending to a long & lingering illness. ^{comes so suddenly} Each single minute some one attempts suicide in the USA. ^{DID YOU KNOW THAT?}

^{MOST} everyone, one noted doctor guesses, has thought about ~~suicide~~ ^{it - or - will - sometime in} their life. ^{75% of families interviewed said it had touched them directly} No one, ^{4 to 5} hundred thousand a year make a serious attempt, somewhere in one of 50 states, a disproportionate number in the Spring (April is the worst month of the year ~~passed~~ ^{comes December} as T.S. Eliot named "The Cruellest month". Second, of course, comes December.)

The ^{highest} percentage ^{groups} in the aging portion of the nation, ^{white aging males are FIRST - who attempted it} 88% by one study had had a serious illness. But teen aged attempts have tripled in the past 10 years. The most notable increase of all is in the aged 6-11 group. No one knows for

Some how many College & Teen age young people attempt it, but we hear ~~about~~ & read about it almost every day or two, & it now ranks as the Third largest cause of death in the age group 15-24 (following accidents & homicide) a 250% increase in 10 short years. ^{Some} other nations ~~have it worse~~ have it worse, all around the world, some others have it better.

Why? I am sure you're asking. What cause it? Well now that's ~~not a question~~ a question but I'll try to answer it in outline.....

One, it has always been the case. Through all recorded history, suicide has been an **OPTION** men have chosen. At times it has been honored, heralded as the King way to die. Many of the ancient Romans argued for it, like Seneca, ~~who~~ performed it on himself to find relief from the sadness & the suffering of growing old & dying slowly. It has been **taunted** as a courageous self conquering event. Many in the history of the church, ~~just~~ to escape the sins of ~~the world~~ the world & go directly to heaven, as their stated motivation

in feudal Japan & ancient Greece..

How awful
the cause.

Maybe, it is not within
their power - surely
God understands

yet The Church has always been against it, esp The Roman Catholic doctrine prohibits ^{the} taking of your life & for centuries the penalty for trying & not succeeding was a public execution! ~~But~~ Augustine ranted against it, as did ~~St Thomas~~ Aquinas & Charles Moore in what still may be the chief religious study of the topic. Aristotle said it was a sign of cowardice, BUT men as far apart as David Hume & John DONNE argued for suicide as a valid option for the living. And Socrates, you all recall ~~with~~ took the hemlock dose quite willingly.

My point is that it has always been an issue & it always will. It is here because of life & death; because of the forces deep within us which call for self destruction, what Freud called **THANATOS**, our drive for death, & escape & release - forever at war with Eros, our force for life & good. As Camus once said "Ambivalence to the fact of our existence is one of Western man's most persistent characteristics." That's all a Smedjeon Deep.

^{So,}
 (2) From there, we go on to more practical & current causes of suicide. Often we do not know why, often there is no answer - But there are ranges, or boundaries we might call them into which the answer fits.

Here is ~~this~~ impersonal society in which we have to live, the demands & often impossible 'expectation' forced upon us & upon the young. We live in a day of less stable family & emotional supports at a time when stability & support are needed all the more. The failure of our materialistic way to provide the happiness, while promising the more, redeems us less & less. With the bombardment of our media, urging us on to the false trapping of existence with the increased assumption often hidden that violence is the answer to the human problems & predicaments. Our whole escapist culture, our fear of war & worse. Our decreasing discipline & disappointment. All that & more, ^{word} lie behind the answer.

Usually something specific triggers it. Usually there are signs & gestures ^{Doctors call them} - not always but often - we could have helped, if not and they then at least we could work to bring a fairer XN life to the people all around us. We could

helping to solve

8

This & most other problems of our time, if we only take the time to discover how to do it & what is needed to make the promise of a lonelier happier ~~place~~ ~~come true~~ more abundant place come true.

Mental struggles usually are alcohol & drugs often are interrelated, ~~and~~ hostility, depression, loss of a relationship, failure to succeed, feelings of worthlessness, anger, anxiety & withdrawal, rejection & guilt are other words we use to ~~the~~ label cause. Usually the suicide victim is depressed & broken for a myriad of reasons. By the time it comes, nothing could have helped.

One final word on cause. Some recent studies, as they do with other maladies of the mind ~~and~~ ~~soul~~ emotion, the soul, ~~seem~~ ~~to~~ be linking suicide with chemical abnormalities in the brain. ^{Don't Run From That Too Soon} One reputable study from ~~out~~ Wayne State University, confirmed by the Natl Institute of Mental Health, ~~has~~ suggests that the absence of a particular chemical necessary for the normal function of the personality (imipramine) ^{contributes} ~~is~~ ~~studied~~

Those who succeeded in committing suicide had a 1/3 to 1/2 greater deficiency. It could be quite a factor, out of ^{the victims} conscious control. We know depression is related to chemical imbalance in the brain, it is mind boggling to think that suicide might also be a malfunction of the system.

~~That's~~ That's First, No Name (9)

AND, ~~the~~ Second ~~is~~ I have guessed you want to know ~~it~~.

(II) ~~How~~ ~~let's~~ ~~know~~ ~~the~~ what The Bible says about Suicide.
outtextbook as
X's people

Unlike what you might suspect
We begin with what Karl Barth called "The
remarkable fact that the Bible nowhere prohibits
The taking of one's life, "not explicitly forbidden" is the
way the Doctor said it.

(16) There are four cases of actual suicide, as we define it, recorded in the Scripture. We define it as the willing, reflection + the taking of one's life - not martyrdom or self sacrifice.
First, the case of Saul & his unarmed armor bearer both of whom fell on their own swords when faced with ultimate defeat at the hands of the Philistines in I Samuel 31, is well known, ~~is better known than the~~ ~~case of any other~~. It follows immediately on the murder ~~of~~ ~~of~~ Saul's son, a contributing fact about the sorrow & horror of which are often forgotten. But the First Great King of the Unified Israel killed himself, & his frightened armor-bearer followed him to death. There is no mention of his evil doing, only a slight regret.

a second is

In the Case of Zimri (I Kings 16¹⁸ Circa) so
 VIVIDLY told in I Kings, his ^{BRIEF BUT} Suicide followed a turbulent
 reign over the Kingdom of Judah, which began when the drunken
 & Lah, son of Ba-a-sha was murdered ~~at TIRZAH~~ by
 Zimri himself. He then proceeded to kill all the male
 members of Baasha's house, ~~at TIRZAH~~ ^{He had worn} the Crown for ^{a scant} 7
 seven days, one week, it says, when the Philistines came, &
 Omri, having taken over the Israelite army, ~~came up~~
~~to~~ went up to TIRZAH, surrounded Zimri's City &
 rather than face his punishment for the evil he had
 committed, he went into the citadel of the King's house
 & set fire to it, & brought the burning roof down on his
 own head - a spectacular suicide in process as ~~the~~
 he Royal Palace Perished in the Royal Palace.

Third: The Suicide of Ahithophel, told in II Samuel 17²³, follows the revolt of Absalom against King David his father, where Ahithophel had counselled with Absalom as to how they could snatch the crown away from David. The best laid plans go astray - as you know + when his chosen 12,000 men were incapable of defeating the King, + when David did not fall into his trap. Ahithophel, it says, saddled up his ass; went off to his own city, set his house in order (whatever that means) + went out + hanged himself, + died.

A pattern often seen. Most successful suicide plan it well.

The Case of Judas is the best known of all even if a trifle more confusing ~~for it is~~ There are 2 separate stories told in The New Testament as to how Judas took his life. ~~Following~~ Following his betrayal of Jesus, & the remorse which Judas felt, it says in Matthew (27:5), he threw down his 30 pieces of silver before the Chief priests & the Elders & went out & hanged himself. They took the money & bought a burial ground for the poor.

According to Luke in Acts I, it says that Judas bought a field with his pieces of silver, & he fell head-long in the middle (presumably of a cavern in the field) and was crushed to death.

~~This is the same as to say~~ There is no condemnation
 of any of these acts of suicide. In fact, with Judas Iscariot &
 Ahithophel at least, there is the hint that it was a proper
 end for their betrayal of Jesus X as well as David.

There are a few other references to suicide in the
 expanded Roman Catholic Bible, when in I Maccabees 6⁴³
 Eleazar exposed himself to certain death, but for the common good, & the
 lone incident of Razias in II Maccabees (14:41f.)

We also note in Acts 16²⁷. An incident where Paul
 prevented a suicide, ~~NOT~~ presumably because
 it would have been wrong for the Philippian jailor to have
 taken his life ~~as~~ as required, ~~if~~ his prisoners
 had escaped, but because they had not escaped, the
 words which Paul uses here are an eternal
 message to the world be suicidal victim -
 "Do not harm yourself, Paul cried, for we are all here!"

(15)

Not every act of self destruction in the Bible qualifies as suicide. For while Samson in Judges 16³⁰ surely kills himself in the great Philistine Temple as he shined out the pillars and perished ~~it~~ with a multitude of the enemy, it while important to our topic, is a different kind of self-annihilation. & others often, as in the case with Jesus Christ himself give up their lives to seek & serve a higher will & purpose.

deny its application to suicidal death. No man
 ever hates his own flesh Paul says in Ephesians, &
~~there~~ like the love of self to X's love for his church.
 The Sixth Commandment not to kill also can apply.
 Life itself has a distinct ethical & eternal content
 from the moment of creation. Suffering, as revealed
 essentially in Christ (cf Roman 5:3, 8:18, etc.)
 has a divine purpose in the world. God's power to
 create & recreate again any life that's fallen or just
 falling even is forever taught & glorified.

Whatever be your circumstances, or less or
 his, God is still at work calling you & he or she to
 more. He can help you find the power to overcome
 & what's more, he will.

^{a Thee}
So Then We Come To The Cure ...

(18)

(III) lastly ~~I~~, I have guessed you want to know what we can do about it, or more personally, what you can do about it.

(A) We can affirm life & support all life
Supporting efforts & movement in the world.

(B) We must begin TO TALK ABOUT IT MORE

Cancer - It can be researched & cured
alcoholism - It can be understood.
Death itself - It can be faced & Coped

Now, we must break the Conspiracy of Silence which surrounds ~~the~~ suicide, to gain & share the knowledge which we have or could have if we worked hard enough to find it.

There are those today who go too far - like EXIT - the ORGANIZATION which prepared a manual how to do it well, & well.

(16)

So ~~the~~ what then shall we say as to what the Bible says of suicide, esp. as to a prohibition which we often feel is there. as always the Scripture understands the powers & the pressures of the self destructive force within us all, whether it be guilt, as with Judas; defeat as with Ahitophel; with the need to spare oneself a greater horror & suffering as with Zimri & with Saul; or even with the conscious desire to join another beloved one in death (as with Saul's armor bearer) the Bible acknowledges the ^{wide range of} causes ~~that~~ in which most suicides occur.

The Prohibition comes from the larger view of what ~~the~~ God in Jesus Christ & the Bible are about. The sanctity of life itself is what I am speaking of. It is our human sin which causes suicide, says De Bault, "The flouting of the faithfulness of God: We are not lords & masters of our lives. & while I will surely understand the ~~power~~ self defeating power which lies behind each attempt at suicide; while God surely can forgive us for this & every other short coming which we have, still ~~with~~ respect for life is taught so completely in the Bible that we cannot

③ We must learn to recognize the signals of those around us, to be open to talk out, to love & listen to what hurt is being handled - people in trouble normally need less pressure, not more. We need a person oriented schema to ~~hand~~ overcome the impersonal forces all around

Must train ourselves to reach the Superhero

(4) Do we need to Teach ourselves &
our children How to Cope ...

Doris Bolton of The Link Counseling Center is
at center

4 Coping Skills

(1) To develop an individual's self-esteem
internalized intrinsic value

(2) To Teach Communication Skills
So person can release
their feelings

Teach
(3) "Positive failure" is a culture
Based on #1, it is imperative for
a child to learn what is and has
gone wrong can work for good

(4) Help individuals to handle grief
Suicide often follows loss
of ability to deal with it.

⑤ Then, as always we need to offer
prayer, renewing love a life of
Jesus X our Lord....

to families

friends

in memory

We could have helped poor Audrey, but we didn't, & we can't now. The PAST is PAST indeed. The Question is whether we can help others in the future, & the Answer is "We Can" - we can be ~~of~~ instruments on which X can play his Psalm of Peace.... Freud thought he had discovered a new diameter in Thanatos & Eros; Moses knew it first long ago - Back in Deuteronomy... God himself is speaking

"I have set before you life & death,
blessing & curse, mourning & the mourning -
Therefore choose life, that you & your
descendants may live! Loving the Lord our
God & cleaving to him as we reach out
into the lives of others, in Jesus Christ our Lord
Now & Evermore
Amen