

There was something fitting about that first night in the hospital, stripped of most possessions, even my shoelaces, wearing nothing but boxers, a hospital robe, and bright blue hospital socks. It was as if all the armor and barricades that I had constructed between the tempest raging internally and my outside affect had been pulled away, revealing the cuts and burns on my naked arms and the exposed, vulnerable mess of my actual experience. Sometime that first day I asked for a pen and a pad of paper, and I began to write obsessively. In hindsight, much of what I wrote during that time is incoherent, clearly manic, or simply wrathful, but there are occasional moments of lucidity. In one such moment, I stumbled into an image that would follow me over the next six months as I bounced in and out of four acute psychiatric hospitalizations, one outpatient program, and one transitional living program housed on a hospital campus. It was an image of Christ on the psych ward:

Hebrews 1:3 says that “[Jesus] is the reflection of God’s glory, and the exact imprint of God’s very being, and he sustains all things—bears along all things—by his powerful word.”

Christ bears along. These words are giving me some comfort. The Human One who is the imprint among us of God’s very being is the same One who bears all things with us, who sustains us and holds us in being.

Christ is on the psych ward, bearing along. Suffering along. Sustaining the woman who can’t sleep can’t sleep can’t sleep. Bearing along the scared young person with the addiction who wants to stop hating herself, wants to stop being disgusted with herself. Suffering with all those who feel they break relationship, hurt people, want to hurt themselves.

This Jesus knows a thing or two about broken relationships, about people hurting, about a body tearing itself apart. “Because he himself was tested by what he suffered, he is able to help those who are being tested” (Heb. 2:18). “All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself

through Christ, and has given us the ministry of reconciliation” (2 Cor. 5:18). And this reconciliation, this bearing along, has a universality to it, for it is Christ “through whom [God] also created the world” (Heb. 1:2) and “in him all things in heaven and on earth were created” (Col 1:16) and are held together (Col. 1:17).

So here is Christ on the psych ward, just like Christ at the checkpoint or the food line or the refugee camp—bearing along, sustaining, holding together the jagged bits that cut, that bleed, to hold onto.

“I’m not going to lie to you. I feel really awkward, but I’m glad I’m here,” said one visitor. “I might be a mess, but I’ll be there,” said another. “Solidarity is salvation,” said a third. Here are people who, whether they know it or not, are bearers of the Christ who bears along all things, sustains all things. The one who sits with, the one who listens, who bears up, who holds your hand or your arm when you thought all it could hold was the knife of self-injury; they merge, somehow, mysteriously, sacramentally, into the One who ultimately holds us together at the most broken place of all.

Life. Death. Resurrection.

Christ is here on the psych ward as surely as in any book or any church. “What matters is you getting better,” the social workers say. “What matters is your healing.” But they also say, “Some of the best insights come from each other,” or, “does anyone else in the group resonate with what _____ just said?”

“I feel so fragile.” “I just wish I could sleep.” “I’m embarrassed, ashamed.”

Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, Savior, be gracious to us.

We are your broken ones.