>> McKenzie Stribich: Just wanted to reiterate for anybody who missed it or wasn't here last time, this is a collaboration between St Luke's Episcopal Church in Long Beach and RespectAbility, which is an advocacy organization for those with disabilities, myself included. And we, both organizations have put a lot of time, a lot of human resources into this, and a lot of financial investment in this. So if you feel so inclined, we would love for you to donate. It would be really helpful in covering the costs and all of the time we've spent on all of this. So I'm going to drop a link in the chat, because without donations programs like this would not be possible for either organization that's involved. If you're not able to donate of course that's okay, but if you are and if you've enjoyed this, program I would highly encourage it, and thank you very much. With that, I think I'm gonna hand it over to Dave, our fearless leader.

>> David Tabb Stewart: Well, I don't know if I'm fearless or not, but I'm going to share screen here. And just say for a minute here before we get into what's on the screen that I am Dave Stewart and I'm a professor at Long Beach State and Hebrew Bible is my specialty, and actually disability is one of my research interests and areas, and there you go! That's why we're talking about it this evening. I was a contributor to a book called The Bible and Disability: A Commentary, which is one of the first disability commentaries on the Bible--may be the first, and so we're kind of going through some of the things that I've written about, and also some other people in the commentary have written about. So — I have on the screen here that we're in session four and we're going to be talking about disability and the prophets and psalms, and especially we're going to sort out and talk about Mephibosheth and disability outside the priesthood. So I'm going to try and see if we can't work this. Yeah there we go. Okay, very good. So what I do at the beginning is I take a little time for a review so that you kind of know how we got to the point we're at tonight. So one of the things we began with was in Exodus chapter four, that Moses had a heavy mouth and tongue, we're told. And he had also some other impairments, which went along with it in some fashion, that he had a possible mobility impairment and difficulty stretching out his hand. And somebody has suggested that all three of these things might have been the result of the stroke, which was a very interesting idea. But in any case, over the course of his story, he begins to become more free with talking and seems to also move around increasingly better. But one of the interesting things we found out in the beginning of the story is that the speech impediments that are mentioned are weirdly and interestingly counted on the same level with blindness deafness and also hearing and sight and speech facility--they're all accounted on kind of the same level. And this is indicated by the, actually the form of the nouns that are used. This "qittel" form is a form of a noun in Hebrew that's used with disability terms. So we don't normally think of hearing and sight and speech facility as disabilities, but actually this shows up in some other places in the prophets, which we're going to get to tonight. And despite whatever disabilities he had he continued to lead. The second thing that was interesting was that on the second night was that, Aaron's body, to function as high priest, he had to be enabled. It required certain kinds of assistive devices for him to actually function as a priest. So someone who is ostensibly able still needed to be enabled. We also found out that other— that there were 12 visible body "blemishes"--this is a common translation of the word for "mumim"— "mumim," "blemishes." But these 12 visible bodily blemishes disqualified priests, they disabled priests from serving as a priest. But not—and this was again a kind of a surprise--deafness or muteness; they did not disable, were not perceived as disabilities to a priest. Possibly because the Temple was a Temple of Silence; the singing was done outside. Inside there was silence. We are told by Israel Knohl, who has written about this. So extremely interesting, and it points to the fact that disability is a cultural phenomenon. It's not automatically— the fact that someone has something with their body that prevents them from doing something— it's not automatically counted as a disability in in all societies at all times. So one of the things we came up with our second talk was that there were at least two disability— biblical disability categories. On our third talk when we went to explore-- [David mutters to himself] here we go, got too far down here — we went to explore the first disability law — I'll come back Sorry that this hasn't been moving around. I've kept my fingers away from my pad here. When we saw the two categories in in play, deafness is not a mum but blindness is a mum, or "blemish." And actually, they turn out to be head terms for the two biblical categories. And another step beyond that is the word pair "blind" and "lame" also names, along with mumim, the Israelite category of permanent disabilities. So we're going to be talking about "blind" and "lame" tonight. And then we also found that there was another category that— a Biblical category— that we were able to add to the two, which was a temporary disability experienced by Meliam, or Mariam, which was scaly skin disease, which she had for seven days and then it was resolved. And this third category, "tum'a" is-- or sometimes it's translated as "ritual impurity"-- it has nothing to do actually with the with the mums or non-mums. So one of the things again that comes out is we have a kind of a flip that sometimes disability appears to be a kind of divine punishment. And this is, from a modern perspective is unfortunate, because we can see how it's led to different ideologies about disability as being a punishment, in all cases. Whereas the cases that the Bible talks about seem to be limited, we have this tum'a, or ritual impurity, in Miriam's case, which looks like an exception. But then we also mentioned the suspected adulteress in Numbers 5 who goes through this very strange ritual where we don't know absolutely for sure but it looks like one possible outcome or imagined outcome of this ritual curse is that her reproductive organs would prolapse, that is, would fall out of her. Another possibility is that it was talking about inducing a miscarriage. But any any case, this is another kind of tum'a, or ritual impurity. And so it makes us wonder if this is another kind of an exception. It's a strange thing because it seems to be precipitated by patriarchal concerns about whether the wife maybe, but we don't-- the husband doesn't know for sure-- maybe he has had sex with another person. And so because the spirit of jealousy comes upon the husband that he seeks out this ritual to be done to prove whether the wife had done something or not. One imagines that it's possible that this would have— would happen if the woman-- as a kind of psychological response to the ritual-- possibly could have happened for that reason. Or it could have been a way of letting the woman off the hook. I mean it could have been like-- I sort of liked this idea that in order to to defeat the jealousy of husbands, this ritual would have no result, and therefore would save the woman's life perhaps. And then we mentioned this very briefly, that the castrate--that is, the complete eunuch-- was to be expelled from the congregation. So we have another disability that involves reproductive organs, and both of them potentially involve the loss-- although of course of castration does-- but the loss of reproductive organs in both cases. And in this case, the complete castrate cannot be part of the congregation, or the community, of ancient Israel. We'll find out later that in the prophets, in Isaiah and Isaiah chapter 56, the prophet Isaiah comes up, the prophet sees a workaround for this. If the castrate, the eunuch, the "saris,"--and this is the Hebrew word, the "saris"— and that person keeps the Sabbath, and follows God in some fashion, then that person will be given an inheritance thats better than if they had children, and seems to be a workaround. It brings them back into the community. And we've also noticed that there seem to be several workarounds that keep cropping out. Tonight we're going to shift to talking about lameness at first and then blindness second in this category of mumim. And the most significant character in the Hebrew Bible, who has-- is a person with lameness-- is Mephibosheth. Ben-Yonatan Ben Shaul. So he's the grandson of King Saul and the son of Jonathan, and because Jonathan was beloved of David, then he considers giving him a leg up, so to speak. Mephibosheth is an unfortunate sort of name. His real name is Meriba'al. Notice it has that— gods term in it of Ba'al, which means Lord. So Meriba'al. And at some point in time it looks like, you know, one of the transcribers of the Bible just didn't like the name, so in some places it gets changed to Mephibosheth. So "mephi" means "from the mouth of" and "bosheth" is "shame." So he's changed the name into "From a Servant of Ba'al" into to "From the Mouth of Shame"! [chuckles] That's a terrible name! Anyway, when his nurse is taking care of-- this is the the nursery worker, not the, you know, like a nurse that we think of today, but a nursery worker taking care of him as a baby, learns the news that his father, Yonatan, and his grandfather, Shaul, have both died in battle-- the result of that incident, of them both dying in battle means this: that she dropped the baby! She was so upset that she dropped the baby and she broke-- what happened was-- the result was there was trauma to both of his feet. Both of the feet were broken and apparently did not heal well. And so he was lame in both of his feet. And so we have here just an artist's imagination of what an ancient crutch might have looked like at a table because he was invited to sit and eat at the king's table-- of course we don't have any idea what he looked like, although there were artist conceptions of what he looked like but I chose not to use any of them-- any of them because they showed him with this worried, frowny look on his face that didn't seem right to me somehow. So here he is, Mephibosheth is from a royal family, and he has his feet injured in childhood, so it's from trauma, and both of his feet were injured. But at a later point in his life when David— King David asked the question, are there any survivors from the house of Jonathan, someone comes and tells him yes there's Mephibosheth. And so he calls Mephibosheth to the court, to the royal court. Mephibosheth is kind of afraid because he thinks maybe he's going to be knocked off, and he falls on his face and prostrates himself before David. But David instead has him stand back up, and says that he's going to restore the lands of his father to him, and he can sit at the king's table and eat, so he's going to live in the palace. On the one hand this is probably prudent for the king, is to bring a possible royal heir to the throne into close quarters with him. but it also means on a practical level that he'll be in conversation with him regularly, and Mephibosheth will be in a kind of position of a cabinet member for the president, that they'll be able to give advice at regular intervals. So David brought him into his inner circle But his story doesn't end there because in later chapters, you can see in chapter 25, moving on from his beginning of his story in chapter 9 of II Samuel, that he gets pulled into a coup d'etat. This is because his servant, Ziba, is pulled into the coup d'etat that David's son, one of his sons, is attempting. And that pulls Mephibosheth, also, kind of into the coup attempt also. And so when it turns out that David has defeated the coup, and his son has died in battle, one of his sons has died in battle, the one that had pursued the coup-- that Mephibosheth comes back again, and prostrates himself before David, and this time brings with him a gift of various kinds of fruits, raisins and so forth, to give to David-- echoing actually what one of David's wives had done earlier in 1st Samuel. And the king says to him, why didn't you come with me when I went into Exile? Why didn't you come with me? And so what he does is he says, well, you know that I'm lame and so I asked Ziba to saddle up the donkey for me and he wouldn't saddle up the donkey for me so I couldn't come. "Your servant is lame." Kind of as if David didn't know, right? "Your servant is lame." So this seems to be blocked by my-- little screen thing here— [Dave mutters to hiimself] Let's see if I can get rid of it. Now I can't get rid of them so I'll just read what's behind it. That's-- he kind of, what what he did here, is instead of making-- using his crutch as a crutch, he used his lameness as a kind of crutch to save his neck. It's very clever, actually, I think it's very clever to use it as an assistive device in the story. But he's sort of flipped it over and made it something else. And one of the weird and interesting things is that disability in the prophets—because, of course, First and Second Samuel and the former prophets as part of the prophetic literature in the Hebrew Bible, continuously flips the idea of disability in various ways. I better double-check the chat for just a second to see if I have any questions on this. And it looks like no. Okay. So-- [long pause] So we find some other flips. And since we've brought up the topic of flips, and this is found in the prophet Micah, Micah. And I have to say that I was recent-- not so long ago, I was studying Micah with my one of my classes, and this really struck me quite dramatically when I was going with it, with them, through it. And even though I had taught through Micah a bunch of times was like "Oh, David! You just hadn't seen this before!" And so this is the passage that kind of struck me, which was this one. It was a kind of passage of promise. "'On that day,' says the Lord, 'I will assemble the lame...'" "Tsole'a" means "a limping one." So the word "tsole'a" is, which means generally "a limping one," a sheep who has limited mobility, something that a shepherd would be conscious of, happens here to be translated as "lame." "'On that day,' says the Lord, 'I will assemble the lame and gather those who have been driven away, and those whom I have afflicted.'" So He is to some degree equating those that are limping with those who have been driven away-- "and those whom I have afflicted"-- They're all in parallel, so it suggests that they have— they could be synonyms to each other or extending the idea of lameness to all of these other things. And then in the second stanza here he says, "The lame I will make the remnant and those who were cast off a strong nation." The word "remnant" is actually a very pregnant word among the prophets in the Bible, because there are constant promises given to the remnants. Let that be a remnant of the nation of Israel, and a remnant of the nation of Judah. It will be a remnant of the people who would in the end receive blessing from God or deliverance from God. No matter what has happened there's always this remnant. Elijah the prophet once complained to God, "I'm the only one left in Israel that follows you!" And the Divine reply was, Well there's five thousand others that haven't bowed their knee to Ba'al. And so we have here this idea of a residual group. "The lame," he says, "I will make the remnant." So the limping ones will be the remnant, and those who were cast off, a strong nation. So this is, this flip here is that it looks like what's going to happen is that the remnant of the Israelite people, who, metaphorically were all limping, and instead he would make them into a strong nation. So there's this flip from disability into being enabled. In another part of Micah a little bit farther on, it goes the other way; it's flipped in reverse: "As in days when you came out of the land of Egypt," the prophet is saying, "show us marvelous things." "the nations shall see and be ashamed of all their might." "They shall lay their hands in their mouths and their ears shall be dead." So look at this. So we have the nations seeing and then the nations laying their hands on their mouths. The nation seeing and being ashamed, and the nations laying their hands on their mouths, with the end result of their ears being made deaf. So there's a couple of flips here: one is that strong nations [inaudible] in the passage before, those that were limping, so a whole nation of people that were limping, a whole nation of people that were metaphorically disabled, will become a strong nation. Here strong nations explicitly are made ashamed, and in astonishment they covered their mouths, and they become deaf, so that they can't hear anything. so they're seeing whatever happened to the remnant of Israel and being made to be a strong nation. What they're seeing--the result of seeing something then flips into becoming deaf. So the eye gate is working but the ear gate is closed. The "eye gate," e-y-e-g-a-t-e, is open but the ear gait is closed. So not only are the strong nations flipped, but instead of being enabled they become disabled by the things that they see. So really what happens, and I'm following J Blake Couey here, that when we get to the prophets, the prophets are moving away from literal use of disability language, and instead are using— they're metaphoricizing disability, and using it to stand for different things. And so this is both interesting and also the thing that's a little bit dangerous because some readers reading it may see the words but become deaf to the meaning of them. So anyway, one thing that he suggests is that this limited mobility disability becomes in Micah a metaphor for the trauma of exile. So it's not just the trauma of Exile but also for Exile itself. So the Jewish exiles are--and people that are in Exile often actually do experience limited mobility, not because their feet are disabled, or their legs don't work, but just they're not allowed to move around. We can think for instance of some of the migrants crossing the border and coming into the U.S. and how their mobility is restricted. Same thing here. But the thing that's problematic that Couey notices, and the thing that's problematic for us moderns, is that this also represents a projection on disabled people of helplessness and dependency. And so other readers of the Bible not necessarily following the metaphor might be tempted then to use these ideas to instead think of people around them in the present age as having these same qualities of helplessness and dependency, so that a kind of dangerous ideology can also be the fruit of a text like this. I don't know if I should say that fortunately, most people haven't read the book of Micah, so they haven't seen this. [chuckles] Should I say that? I could say that all-- close to zero of my students-- whenever we come to this book haven't read it before, so maybe we're okay. We have another example of this business about tsole'a. So if the nation of Judah, because Micah was talking about the nation of Judah before they were taken into captivity, was tsole'a, a limping sheep. Jacob in Genesis is also described as a limping sheep. The same word is used. And this is after he wrestles with God, so to note here that the verse of the Hebrew Bible is a little bit different; it's one verse away from the verse in English Bibles, most English Bibles. So why is it that wrestling God, with God, leads to disability. I mean this raises another sort of interesting question too, is that if you have an encounter with God, can the encounter with God also be disabling? So not only do we have this interesting issue of metaphoricization of disability that's come up in the prophets, but we also have this other thing about, that makes us wonder, does the Divine encounter disable? So we have to say here that in Micah chapter 7, that the visual experience that the people have results, Couey says, in the loss of other sensory capacities. So apparently meetings with God can be disabling. According to at least, some of the prophets. And as a matter of fact we'll find it in another place! We'll find it in the prophet Isaiah. And Isaiah is--of course both Micah and Isaiah are part of the later prophets, whereas the books of First and Second Samuel are part of the former prophets. So the book of Isaiah is the prophetic book in which there are the most verses, the most instances when disability is taken out. So just as Leviticus kind of seems to be kind of the chief text in Torah or biblical law for disability, Isaiah is kind of the chief text among the prophets in the second division of the Hebrew Bible for disability. And it begins with the kind of a bang when God strikes in the very first chapter of Isaiah, the body of the nation of Judah. So again this is a metaphorical strike on a metaphorical body. But basically on the whole people of Judah. And as Couey has pointed out, the sets up disability as a major imagery that's in use in the prophet Isaiah. And Isaiah also in chapter 3 describes the nation as a lame person, and the leaders as the crutch for the lame person. So not only do we have the nation as a lame person in Micah but we also have it here in Isaiah but with this addition that the leaders are the crutch that the nation leans on. And another surprising thing we have in Isaiah, coming right at the beginning in Isaiah. The prophet is called... You have Isaiah, like Moses, sort of complaining about his not being able to speak exactly. Or he says, I am a man of unclean lips, so how can I actually talk and speak the Divine messages? How can I do that? And an angel comes with a coal or fire that's taken from the Divine Altar and takes it down and puts it on his lips and burns his lips. So this is the opposite of what happened to Moses. Moses had a speech impediment but there were no coals of fire to burn his lips when he was at the burning bush. But instead here, the coal from the altar burns the lips-- presumably damaging the lips-- but that enables him to speak. And then we find in the same place we find Isaiah also then coming up with another metaphor in the same passage in chapter six. Listen, he says to the people, but don't comprehend. See, but do not know. And he's actually describing In this passage in Isaiah 6:9 & 10, he's actually describing that the people are doing this to themselves. They are giving them a self-inflicted disability. They're listening but they don't comprehend; they're seeing but they do not know. So I reported earlier that I had taught through Micah a number of times and had never really been struck by the disability passages until just recently, making me want to teach them again, so hence tonight. But also some of my students have reported interesting things to me about seeing the biblical text but not being able to comprehend it. And oftentimes I found that my male students will read biblical passages that talk about women and somehow not notice that they are women or that women are there. But I was wonderfully and terribly surprised that one of my students said to me that as a woman they were reading a passage where women were mentioned, five different women were mentioned, but they didn't notice that women were there, maybe because many of us have been affected by our own culture so that women aren't the first things on our mind or something. But both myself--I found this in myself, but also from my students that they tell me that they can read and not see, and not know. And so, here also in Isaiah there are people that are seen but not knowing and listening but not comprehending. I think that the prophets are extremely interesting because they-- I'm going to stop sharing that since I'm at the end of my slides here. And so I'm saving time for Jane Gould who's going to come up in a few minutes and talk about the Psalms and things of the Psalms, so the third-- from the third division of the Hebrew Bible, the writings of course-- the songs are the lead book. But I think we can kind of draw some conclusions from just this quick survey of some prophetic elements that speak of various disabilities. And one is that they're-- the prophets seem to make some workarounds for disability. I mentioned--have just mentioned briefly that for the castrate or the eunuch in Isaiah 56, which scholars know as Third Isaiah, so a later part of Isaiah, the eunuchs are given a promise that if they keep the Sabbath that there'll be a place for them and they'll have some-- a better reward than having children. And so that seems to be one of the flips, one of the turnarounds. We've also seen tonight that a nation that is characterized as lame can be made strong. Nevertheless this sort of observation, this metaphoricization, also gives, can give occasion for offensive interpretations. And that, also, that there are people that have eyesight that are not perceiving and that people that have hearing but are not comprehending, And so that their perception is impaired. And Isaiah makes quite a big deal of this, as a matter of fact, and later on is quoted in the Christian Testament and made a big deal there. But this in context, this is a self-disabling moment. People themselves are self-inflicting a disability and that's comprehending, that reading, that perceiving. And yet this one, this also carries with it a kind of dangerous possibility, which is deafness and blindness can both be then equated with incomprehension, non-understanding, and lack of knowledge. And so the feebleness could be attributed to the category of people with disabilities as a whole. So I think that I need to also recognize that there is a danger for misinterpretation of these passages, or possibly that it's just there and there isn't medication for misinterpretation, but people could walk away with it. I think I might have time for one question and before we go on to Jane Gould. So Virginia, or Ashley, one of you quickly go ahead and unmute yourself and...

>> Ashley: Yeah, Dr. Stewart you know, you made an interesting point when you were talking about-- I guess it was Jacob that was wrestling with the Divine Being, and you said something about how, I guess being in the presence of the Divine could cause a disability, and I had made a comment in the chat about Moses and the people because I remember reading how they said, like, they could not stand the presence of God. I didn't know exactly what that meant, but I guess the presence was--whatever it was, they couldn't stand it and they just asked Moses to be, like, their middle-person because they couldn't take it, but I don't know if that was like a physical thing or what that was related to and I wanted to know if you had any comment.

>> Dave: Yeah I think we could probably multiply the examples. And that's what you're doing is you're adding some other examples where, for instance, when Moses asks God to appear to him, God says, well I'm not going to show you anything except my hinder quarters, and then he puts him into collecting the rock we're told in the story, and puts his Divine hand over the crack and then goes by and declares the Divine name. But that seems to imply that there was a danger there too. Maybe there's a danger in the Divine presence of becoming disabled and maybe there is a danger in misusing texts and disabling self or others. [pause] Virginia, is it okay if I ask you to save your question until the end? ...

>> Jane: You can go, it's fine, sure.

>> Dave: Okay, go ahead.

>> Virginia: Oh, well this is really, really quick and you probably already told us, and either I just missed it or I forgot and so I do apologize for not knowing this already, and that is, which version of the Bible are you using in these lessons? [Dave coughs] Are you okay?

>> Dave: I'm using—yes I'm okay--I'm using the New Revised Standard Version.

>> Virginia: New Revised Standard Version, okay.

>> Dave: Yeah, updated--updated edition, which is the — I use in my class. I'm also referring of course to the Tanakh, which is the New Jewish Publication Society Bible translation. But that's goes back to the 80s, so it's a little, it's beginning to become a little bit outdated. And I also of course make reference to the Hebrew text itself, so I go through the Hebrew text and then double-check it against the translations and make some of my comments based on that.

>> Virginia: Okay, well I was just wondering, I was curious. Thank you so much.

>> Dave: You're welcome Virginia. Jane, please!

>> Jane: Yeah. So part of, as we were planning this, part of what Dave said was that if he was going to teach that McKenzie and I both each needed to take a turn, and as I've been learning from Dave both in the classes he's offered and in articles he's been sending my way, part of what's clear is I think that the voices that McKenzie and I bring are just different. What you get in me is a preacher. And what are the impact of these texts on community. And what you get in McKenzie is someone who is disabled, and how does she as a person living with disability engage the text? And so that might or might not have been Dave's reasons for throwing us to you lions, but it has struck me that it was probably sort of an interesting notion to at least a little bit gain the other perspectives. And you know, so as I look at the prophets from the perspective of one who has spent more than 35 years preaching on them, reading, re-reading them, re-engaging them with the perspective of disability has sort of awoken my consciousness to ways in which the texts get used. And so, you know, you get, particularly in Isaiah, this sort of strong notion of God as able-bodied. And in fact, you know as one commentator said, God is abnormal in God's superpower strength and size, you know, that can make the mountains tremble and all of that. And so we sort of get God put out there as able-bodied is the ideal, is the perfection, is the Holy One. And then this contrast with the God of Hebrew scripture, of a living God versus the idols, the mute gods, a living God who carries the people, who bears the people, who upholds the people, delivers the people, rescues the people. Versus the idols who are false gods who must be carried by the people and become weights that the people carry. Then we get Isaiah all the, you know when David was talking about disability and the possibility of, in Isaiah seeing disability as being used metaphorically for those in Exile, the reverse is also true that restoration imagery is all about healing of disabilities, right? When the people are restored the blind will see, the lame will jump, right, it's not--it's this sort of reversal of the process of Exile. And the sort of persistent metaphors of blindness and deaf and failure to see, failure to understand, and the connection of disability as punishment for sin. And so we're sort of getting all that thrown at us with Isaiah. And so I sort of started thinking, right! Every St. Luke's day we read a text from Luke's gospel in which he reads from the scroll of the prophet Isaiah, and of course what does he do? We heal the blind. This is Jesus's mission statement that he's coming to do these acts of healing. And we're just, as we head into Advent and Christmas, the texts we're taking, "The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light," right? Like we're pulling from all of these texts these notions of literally enlightenment being the opposite of the blindness, of the darkness. And certainly in our conversations around deconstructing racism, the light and dark images that we get caught in in Biblical interpretation fit very neatly--not in, necessarily, one would say a positive way, but very neatly with the disability imagery and one of the articles that David sent me was a Jennifer Cusit article dealing with the Psalms, and one of the things she says is "The three primary ways in which Psalms employ metaphors and images of disability demonstrate that disability is stigmatized. Associated with abandonment by and punishment from God, and with sinfulness in general, and idolatry in particular." And so sort of the preacher in me came round and came up with two questions for you all. The first one is -- and this I ask sort of first and foremost of those living with disability, what's your reaction when you hear these texts, these metaphors? What's the effect on you? [pause]

>> McKenzie: Well, this all has made me think very much, and Dave brought it up, the use of crutches as a metaphor, "using blank as a crutch." People say that about religion a lot, right. And I always think I mean my mind goes two different ways with that. You know you could say, well like what's so bad about crutches? What's so bad about using crutches?? Right, you know? Because crutches are for me tools of freedom, I mean I'd be dragging myself everywhere on my hands and knees if I didn't have them. So yeah, it's the the negative imagery. And I have texted Jane probably more than once about blindness and deafness coming up in our liturgy. It always rubbed me the wrong way, you know. So, yeah, I'd love to hear from other people too.

>> Jane: Virginia.

>> Virginia: Well, I'm never averse to sharing my opinion. Ya'll just have to tell me to shut up. And I know you don't want to hear me. But there's a couple of things. I tend to be a very positive person, and one of the things I wanted to to say to you, Jane, is over in Japan, they they will take say a vase or a goblet or something like that that's like bisque, like pottery, and if it falls over and it gets broken they will very, very carefully glue it back together again. And then they don't stop there; then they take gold paint and they will paint over all of the cracks with gold paint to highlight them. Because it's the cracks that are the special parts. It's the broken places that are the uniqueness, that are the most valuable parts. And the Jewish idea about this is that we are all of us broken, and if we highlight the broken parts of ourselves and of other people, then we appreciate the differences all the more, and we don't see them so much as punishment for sin. That one has always, even before I converted, that one has always bothered me. Or something that makes us imperfect or less-than. So I just wanted to say that.

>> Jane: Yeah, and we'll come round there, I think -- but what do you do with the texts, though, that do equate with punishment and sin and lack of sight and lack of insight? I mean I agree with you on you know the whole line of the cracks are where the light shines in, right.

>> Virginia: Yeah, that's exactly the best way to put it. I love that Jane.

>> Jane: Not original to me.

>> Virginia: [laughs] Well as far as I'm concerned it is; that's the first time I've heard anybody say that. I have never liked someone who is disabled being described as less-than. My mother was disabled, not like I am but a different way, and I've always been around disabled people so to me they were people who just happened to be disabled. They weren't the disability that happened to be in human form. And now that I have converted I see a different point of view in Judaism than I ever saw from Christianity. Moses' disability was not seen as a failure on his part, or a less-than on his part. I mean he is the writer of the five books, and yet he was disabled so it wasn't a problem for him to be disabled so. That's kind of how I see it now.

>> Jane: Yeah, yeah. I'm just trying to get us to sort of focus on the texts in the prophets and in the Psalms, and the metaphors that they actually have there and how we live with them. Other people's thoughts?

>> Julie: Well, you know my first husband lost his vocal cords due to throat cancer, and he went from a vibrant, German, fun guy who was able to speak to not being able to speak at all, and I remember he went to the market one day to get something and the young girls behind the counter told them he was handicapped. And it was heartbreaking for him to come home and try to explain to me what had happened to him. And of course I had to go back there and ring — take them through the ringer. But I I think for a long time he felt like he was being punished and in some respects I had a hard time not agreeing with him because he had smoked. And so you know, there -- I didn't know how to deal with that except to you know, just work with him to learn how to speak however he could, but you know for somebody who was very vibrant and gregarious and all of a sudden the silence was deafening. And that's always how I explained it to several people, so that first time that we had dinner and he could not speak during dinner was heartbreaking. So you know we experienced a disability in our family that we had never had before, and I'm sure if he was around to to hear some of this scripture now, I think he'd be sitting with it but I think it would be hard for him to hear. Definitely. Well, one of the things that -- one of the articles Dave gave me was from John Hull -- I think John? -- who is a blind biblical scholar. And one of his comments was, in looking at blindness in the Bible, he said, well, "You just have to remember that it's written by a sighted person who has not altogether understood the nature of God as being Beyond sighted people's preferences." Does that help enough?

>> Virginia: That's extremely profound. I love that. It was beautiful. I probably should have put my hand up, sorry.

>> Jane: Nope, that's fine. [laughs] [crosstalk] That's fine. You know 'cause McKenzie's right when she says if we're reading a Psalm that is — or reading a prophetic text or really anything where we're seeing the use of these metaphors, and I admit, I'm going into Advent and Christmas with like, "Oh! I'm just reading these things differently!" And there's the question of, if you're a preacher working with a lectionary, your texts are assigned. And how do you read it and not comment on it? But so often the texts do contain these images, these metaphors. So I'm just curious in people's various faith communities, how, what do you do -- what would you do, how are these texts engaged? Or, in the way that Dave described his students and his self sometimes, we just read them without really noticing. And I admit when I read John Hull's comment, I thought, "Yes, this is true," but I've also been told the same thing with people saying well, you know, the Bible was written by men, the stories were told by men to men. And so they forgot that the people of God include, as we would now say, a whole range of gender diversity. So I guess, how do people in your faith communities deal with the text? Because that's one of my questions going forward. Dave is your hand up?

>> Dave: I am, well I've been in different faith communities at different times. But one thing that I think that could be done is to, when you come across the difficult text, is to compare it with another text. And so it is in dialogue with the other text. So, reading the passage from Isaiah in the synagogue in the Christian Testament, the story that you were accounting from the Gospel of Luke, you could compare that with where it says in the Psalms that God dwells in darkness.

>> Jane: Mhm. Yeah, or like Psalm 38 where God — it starts with the use of, "There is no soundness in my flesh because of your indignation. There is no health in my bones because of my sins. My wounds grow foul and fester because of my foolishness, for my loins are filled with burning and there is no soundness in my flesh." Sin being manifest in the body and God's rejection being presented as he logical implication, and then later in the same psalm, God's voice, "But I am like the deaf, I do not hear, like the mute who cannot speak." So this sense of bodily disability, sickness, all coming as a result of sin, but then, same Psalm verse 13 through just slightly later, the voice of God: "But I am like the deaf. I do not hear. Like the mute, who cannot speak." And so your notion, Dave, of like, sometimes you can hold two texts in tension with each other, to sort of raise up issues. But I just would love, whether now or when folks have had a chance to think about it, because I know for me it's never been enough to say well, the Bible was written in a culture of patriarchy by men and that explains. That doesn't answer what we do with the text. And so I would just love, even next week or whenever, if folks have ideas of how we deal with the text. But where I did want to finish, and Virginia has sort of nodded in this direction, is that, actually, we started with this gathering with Moses as our disabled leader. He's the disabled hero. And then, when we come into first Samuel, and Samuel choosing who is going to be the king, and he's looking at all of Jesse's sons, and it's like, nope not that one, they're bringing out the big strong guys and they're gorgeous and all of this stuff, and what we get is, God doesn't see with human eyes, right? God's not seeing the same way you are. So we bring David. Now, but then we're told David was of ruddy complexion and had these gorgeous eyes, right? So we seem to have forgotten all the sudden that looks don't matter. All of a sudden they're starting to matter again. But at least we're having held up in front of us that God is not just looking for what's on the outside of us. And then we see again and again that those who see God, whether it's Miriam's skin disease, whether it's Jacob wrestling with the angel, this encounter with God does often create these disabling -- whether temporary or permanent realities -- Isaiah's lips being burned to, at some level purify, but again the physical body being compromised in some way to enhance the one called by God's ability to speak, to function as God's leader. And so and I, and I think you go in Isaiah, the [indistinguishable], what Christians tend to refer to as the Suffering Servant songs. Again, the servant is the one who is bruised and beaten, broken like a reed. These are the ones God's chosen, and when you then come into how Christians use Hebrew scripture, the suffering servant becomes our prototype for Jesus as the faithful one of God, who rather than defeating all the enemies, leading a military army, taking over and sort of bashing -- being the Conquering Messiah, is the one who dies on a cross. And so there's this entire powerful tradition of God's choice not being the one of power and perfection. But rather God's choice being the one who has some weakness. Paul was very clear about some kind of disability. So I just think it's interesting that we balance these traditions, that on one hand, we use all these metaphors of weakness and disability and sort of this notion that what -- that disability is something folks need protection and care. But then those are so often the ones God chooses. And so that was kind of where I wanted to have my piece end tonight of -- so who are the ones God chooses? And why is God leaning in the direction of those who know struggle, who know weakness, who know brokenness in some way?

>> Dave: Okay, I suppose I should announce the topic for next week, which we will go and look at the Christian Testament in the Gospel of John, and McKenzie is going to be my co- worker, maybe you'll do more work than I do on it, I don't know. But anyway we're going to work together on talking about that next week. So I look forward to seeing everybody. I pass it back to McKenzie, yes. [McKenzie chuckles]

>> McKenzie: Well thank you Dave and Jane. This has been my favorite night so far, I think, and I think that's because I think a lot about these metaphors and how damaging they are to my community. And so to hear that my very own clergy is absorbing this in a way that's changing their viewpoints and the way they approach these texts and the way that they will bring them forward to our congregation is so massively encouraging to me. That's why we're doing this. That's why I have put so much heart and time into this entire endeavor. That's why Shelly is here doing what she does. Shelly is my boss by the way. [chuckles] She prefers when I say that she's my co-worker, but we all know the truth. But I just wanted to thank each and everybody, each and every person here for being here. Again I'm going to do that thing that non-profits do, and ask, suggests that if this program has been of benefit to you, if you found it interesting, stimulating in any way that you might consider donating either to RespectAbility or St Luke's or both. I have dropped the link in the chat for both of those donation pages. Because we put a lot of time and human and monetary resources, we have put a lot of time and monetary and human resources into this event, and I think it's been really great. So thank you for joining us. And yeah, last week will -- or next week will be our last week. So I hope you can join us. And with that, I'll wish everybody a good night.

>> Shelly: Thank you. Good night, everyone.