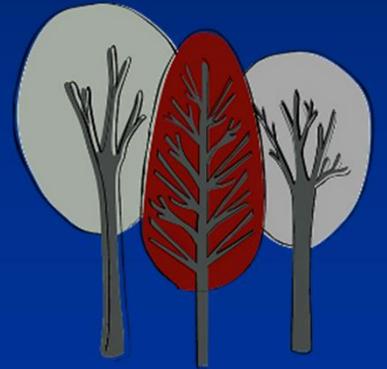


Dementia Through A Spiritual Lens

1. Dementia Through a Medical Lens
2. Dementia: Mind, Memory, and God



Kenneth L. Carder



Ministry
with the
Forgotten

Dementia through
a Spiritual Lens

Primary Reference

- **Ministry With The Forgotten: Dementia Through A Spiritual Lens**, Kenneth L. Carder. 2019, Abingdon Press, ISBN 978-1-5018-8024-7.





Kenneth Carder

- Served as a pastor of United Methodist local congregations in Virginia and Tennessee for 35 years.
- **1992 to 2004:** Bishop in the United Methodist Church.
- **2004 to 2009:** Served on the faculty of Duke Divinity School.
- **Nov 2009:** his wife was diagnosed with frontotemporal **dementia**.
- He became his wife's primary caregiver.
- As her disease progressed over the next 10 years, she eventually required institutional care at a memory care facility.
- He served as a chaplain at the memory care facility where his wife lived for 18 months. ■

Questions

- Where is **God** on this treacherous and uncertain journey with **dementia**?
- What is the essence of **personhood**? Is the one you have loved *still there* when personality and cognitive changes seem to create a *different* person?
- What if the person *forgets* **God**?
- Can one be a **Christian disciple** when she/he has *forgotten* **Jesus**? ■

Questions

- What does it mean to be part of the **church** when one can *no longer* participate?
- What is the **church**'s role for those affected by **dementia**?
- What finally *endures* when cognitive capacities are *lost*?
- What does **salvation/wholeness** really mean?
- How can one *hope* when *loss* is a *constant* companion?
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Outline

■ **November 29:**

- 1. Dementia Through a Medical Lens
- 2. Dementia: Mind, Memory, and God

■ **December 6:**

- 3. Dementia and God's Nature and Action
- 4. Dementia and the God Who Is Incarnate

■ **December 13:**

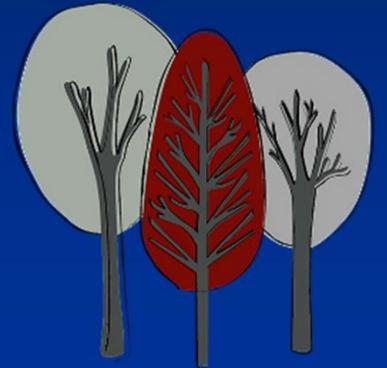
- 5. Dementia and the Meaning of Personhood
- 6. Dementia and the Meaning and Source of Salvation

■ **December 20:**

- 7. Dementia and Christian Discipleship
- 8. Dementia, Grieving, and Death ■

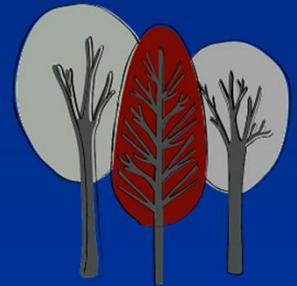
- PowerPoint presentations from the series can be downloaded from:

www.StJohnAdultEd.Org/dementia.htm



ST. JOHN IN THE WILDERNESS

Dementia Through a Medical Lens



ST. JOHN IN THE WILDERNESS

Dementia Through a Medical Lens

- **Dementia** is umbrella term covering a constellation of symptoms (= **syndrome**) that may be due to *several* underlying diseases.
- World Health Organization's ICD-10: **Dementia** is a **syndrome** due to disease of the brain, usually of a chronic or progressive nature, in which there is *disturbance of multiple* higher cortical functions, including:
 - memory,
 - thinking,
 - orientation,
 - comprehension,
 - calculation,
 - learning capacity,
 - language,
 - judgement. ■

Dementia Through a Medical Lens

- Consciousness is *not* clouded.
- The impairments of *cognitive* function are commonly accompanied, and occasionally preceded, by deterioration in:
 - emotional control,
 - social behavior, and/or
 - motivation. ■

Types of Dementia

- The most common neurodegenerative conditions causing **dementia** are:
 - **Alzheimer disease** (60 to 80% of cases),
 - Dementia with Lewy bodies,
 - Frontotemporal dementia,
 - Parkinson disease dementia. ■

Prevalence of Dementia

- 5.8 million people have **Alzheimer's** or another form of **dementia**.
- 1 in 10 people age 65 and older has **Alzheimer's disease**. The percentage of people increases with age:
 - 3% of people age 65 to 74,
 - 17% age 75 to 84,
 - 32% age 85 and older.
- Every 65 seconds someone in the US develops the disease.
- Almost two-thirds of Americans with **Alzheimer's disease** are women. ■

Prevalence of Dementia

- Neurocognitive diseases are the sixth leading cause of death,
 - more than breast cancer and prostate cancer combined.
- Between **2000** and **2015**:
 - deaths by heart disease *decreased* by 11 percent,
 - deaths from **Alzheimer's disease** *increased* by 123 percent.
- Between **2018** and **2025**, the number of people with **Alzheimer's disease** is expected to increase by at least 13 percent.
- By the year **2050**, the number of people with **Alzheimer's disease** is projected to rise to nearly 14 million,
 - more than double the current number of 5.8 million. ■

Prevalence of Dementia

- More than 18.5 billion hours of informal, unpaid care were provided by dementia caregivers in **2018**,
 - a contribution to the nation valued at nearly \$234 billion.
- In **2019, Dementia** cost Americans an estimated \$290 billion in health care, long-term care, and hospice.
 - By **2050** the amount could increase to \$1.1 trillion. ■

Current Understanding of the Brain

- The future will judge our current understanding of the **brain** as *primitive*.
- Jeff W. Lichtman, MD and PhD, Professor of Molecular and Cellular Biology at Harvard, often asks his students: “**If understanding everything we need to know about the brain equals one mile, how far do you think we have walked?**”
- His usual student answers are: “**three quarters,**” “**one half,**” or “**one quarter.**”
- Professor Lichtman’s answer: “**I think about three inches.**” ■

Causes of Dementia

- There are 100 billion **neurons** or nerve cells in the brain.
- Each **neuron** connects to thousands of other neurons through chemical messengers called **neurotransmitters**.
- At any one moment, millions of signals are passing from **neuron to neuron**.
- In order to stay healthy, **neurons** need:
 - to communicate with one another,
 - receive adequate nutrition (oxygen and glucose) through their blood supply,
 - be able to repair themselves. ■

Causes of Dementia

- The disorders that cause **dementia** *disrupt* these functions.
- **Dementia** results because:
 - connections between **neurons** are interrupted or lost,
 - **neurons** cannot metabolize nutrients and/or their blood supply is interrupted,
 - **neurons** cannot repair themselves,
 - **neurons** die. ■



Video: How Alzheimer's Changes the Brain - National Institute on Aging

Treatment of Dementia

- *No* curative treatment exists for **Alzheimer's** and other **dementias**.
- Some medications can decrease symptoms or enhance functioning for a time:
 - Aricept (donepezil),
 - Namenda (memantine).
- Other medications may be used to control behavioral and mood symptoms (agitation, anxiety, aggression, depression). ■

Treatment of Dementia

- The most promising current efforts are directed toward prevention and delaying the onset of **dementia**.
- Factors in maintain brain health include:
 - maintaining good cardiovascular health through exercise and a healthful diet,
 - engaging in lifelong learning,
 - staying active and socially involved with others.
- However genetics and other factors may result in the disease despite our best efforts at prevention. ■

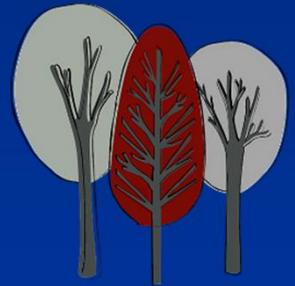
Disease Course

- The diseases causing **dementia** are *progressive*, the severity of the symptoms *increasing* as cells die.
- Life expectancy after diagnosis: 2 to 20 years.
- Death often occurs as the *indirect* consequence of the underlying pathology, such as:
 - a fall,
 - pneumonia or other infection,
 - inability to swallow. ■

Disease Course

- Each person with **dementia** is *unique*.
- The particular symptoms, and the degree of progression of each symptom, will vary from person to person.
- Even persons in the severe stage of **dementia** may mysteriously have short lucid moments:
 - **“Kissing the joy as it flies by”** is the challenge of caregivers and family members as they journey with the person with **dementia**. ■

Dementia: Mind, Memory, and God





Video Excerpt from “Who am I? Identity, Faith, and Being Human,” John Swinton and Rowan Williams.

The Autobiographical Self

- The **Autobiographical Self**:
- “You are who you are as long as you can remember who you are. If you can *no longer* remember your own story, your autobiography, then you are *not* the person you used to be.”
- “...we are who we remember ourselves to be.” ■

The Importance of Memory

- We each think of ourselves as a *single person*, a *single person* existing through time, a *single person* whose **story** is continuing to unfold.
- At any moment, the continuity of our **personhood** is powered and maintained by our continued:
 - living in our **past** through our **memory**,
 - living in our **present** through agency: acting, doing what we decide and wish to do,
 - living in our **future** through our hopes, dreams, and plans for our future. ■

The Importance of Memory

- What then happens to our continuity as a *single person* with a story, a **person** with a **past**, **present** and **future**, if the engines powering the continuity of our **personhood** break:
 - if we cannot remember our **past** – if we lose our **Autobiographical Self**,
 - if we cannot act with “agency” in the **present**,
 - if we cannot hope, dream, or plan for our **future**. ■

The Importance of Memory

- David Keck (author of *Forgetting Whose We Are: Alzheimer's Disease and the Love of God*) who cared for his mother with Alzheimer's suggests: **“It is impossible to distinguish between ourselves and our memories. . . . We are our memories , and without them we have but a physical resemblance to that person we each suppose ourselves to be. . . . The apparent dissolution of the mnemonic capacities . . . raises most serious and profound questions about human existence.”**

The Importance of Memory

- If the **memory** of our **past** is *lost*, if that sole link with our **past** is *severed*, how can we claim to be the **person** of our **past**?
- How can we claim to be a **person** who has a **story**? ■

Communal Memory

- In considering these issues, consider the following:
- *Our memories* of our **past** are *not* the *only* memories of our **past**.
- **Memory** is *more than* a skill held within the individual.
- Most people remember only a *small fraction* of the details of their past, and must depend upon *others* to fill in the gaps of their flawed recollection:
 - We have few, if any, memories of the first few years of our lives – our parents hold those memories for us.
 - Our family members, friends, associates, neighbors, teachers, even casual acquaintances hold impressions and memories of us that are outside our own recollection. ■

Communal Memory

- We all hold **memories** for one another.
- This **communal memory** is an important part of each of our life **stories**, a part we often do not appreciate as much as we should. ■

Theology of Memory

- But even if we could pool:
 - all the **memories** we've ever formed of our **past** (even those we subsequently forgot), and
 - all the memories and impressions of ourselves in every acquaintance and friend,
- they would still form:
 - but a fragmented picture of our **past**,
 - a **story** with more gaps than narrative.
- Our true identity and past, our true **stories** ultimately lie only in **God's memory**.
- Who am I? What is my **story**? Only God knows! ■

Theology of Memory

- Isaiah 49:15-16 (NRSV): “Can a woman forget her nursing child, or show no compassion for the child of her womb? Even these may forget, yet I will not forget you. See, I have inscribed you on the palms of my hands ...”
- **God’s memory** of us, God’s holding within God’s mind our story, is part of the way:
 - God knows us,
 - God sustains us,
 - God loves us. ■

Theology of Memory

- God also has a **story**.
- God's creation and sustaining of the universe, God's work of salvation of God's people is God's project, and each and every one of us is part of this project of God, and:
 - Our stories are also part of God's story.
 - Our memories are also part of God's memory.
- John Swinton: **“Human memory is nothing more (and nothing less) than one mode of participation in the memory of God, which is our true memory and our only real source of identity and hope.”** ■

Theology of Memory & the Church

- The **Church** is a community of remembrance and a steward of memories.
- It is the community that keeps alive **God's story**:
 - In Deuteronomy 6:12, the people are cautioned, **“take care that you do not forget the LORD, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery”**
 - The psalmist declares, **“Remember the wonderful works he has done”** (Psalm 105:5).
 - At the center of our faith is the act of remembrance in the Eucharist: Jesus asked us: **“Do this in remembrance of me,”**
- What might be the role of the **church community** in being stewards of the stories of those with **dementia** – stories that are also part of the **God's story**? ■

Memory, the Mind and the Brain

- **Memory** is a facet of the **Mind**.
- But what exactly is the **Mind** and how does it relate to the **Brain**?
- This is the core question of an entire branch of philosophy, **Philosophy of Mind**. ■

Mind versus Brain

- In **Philosophy of Mind**, there are 2 primary views of the relationship between the **Mind** and the **Brain**:
- 1. **Dualism**: the **mind** and **brain** are fundamentally different things:
 - 1.1. two completely different entities or “**substances**”, one non-physical/non-material, and one made of physical matter = **Substance Dualism**.
 - 1.2. two different “**properties**” of a *single substance*, a substance that can take on *both* non-physical/non-material. and physical/material properties = **Property Dualism**.
 - 1.3. the **mind** is the non-physical/non-material “form” or “information content” of the physical **brain** = **Hylomorphic** or **Thomistic dualism**.
- 2. **Materialism**: the **mind** and the **brain** are the *same*, the **mind** simply a manifestation, a product of the **brain**. ■

Mind versus Brain

- If the **mind** and **brain** are two *different* things, then:
- Perhaps **dementia** (a disease of the brain) could be viewed as a disruption of the *connection* between **mind** and **brain**:
 - The **mind** itself remains undamaged and intact within its non-physical (non-material) realm, but can no longer connect properly to the **brain**;
 - Only the **brain** is diseased and damaged. ■

Mind versus Brain

- However, if the **mind** and **brain** are the *same* thing, then damage to the **brain** is the *same as* damage to the **mind**:
- Loss of **brain** cells = Loss of the **mind**. ■

Mind versus Brain

- These are two *completely different* scenarios:
 - intact **mind**, damaged **brain**
 - *versus*
 - damaged **mind**, damaged **brain**.
- Whichever is true, we must keep in mind:
 - God sustains in existence and holds within God's mind (= remembers) *all* things,
 - God sustains in existence and holds within God's mind that which we call our **mind / soul**,
 - God sustains in existence and hold within God's mind that which we call the **brain**,
- So nothing is ever lost. ■

Next Week:

3. Dementia and God's Nature and Action
4. Dementia and the God Who Is Incarnate

