

Chronicles of Diversity

Your leadership weekly



St. Paul's Mission in NE Washington

High springs

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Life is more like this week's story, than most of those that I write. This week I know the ending, the adventure is just what will occur to get us there. I have a few stops I would like to express, but for the most part, from here to there is just a blank page.

For those of you who may be amazed at the complexity of some of these weekly articles, in last week's Seeds for Prayer, you had the vision God gave me of heaven, jumping from one building to another. Even that simple dream left me somewhat breathless all day, until I went to sleep that night. Therefore much of that complexity is due, not to my ability, but friendly but foreign inspiration.

After my 911 visit, that next morning, Tuesday, I called to see if I could come by my doctor, who I had not seen in at least five years. They took a chest x-ray, gave me an electrocardiogram, and said that they would schedule me for a tread mill test. That was it.

Friday morning I got a call from the clinic telling me to go to the outpatient area of the hospital for a CT scan. "You should plan to be there until we tell you that you can leave." were the shocking words I heard at the end of the telephone receiver. Then the words of Dr. Lee rebounded in my mind, "Your ECG was fine and your x-ray also appears good." I remember thinking, "appears good," or what ever specific term he actually used, seemed to be a little tentative.

When I checked my voice mail calls from Thursday afternoon, while I was out running errands and other events of life, I heard at least three calls asking me to call my doctor. I prayed a deep prayer of gratitude that I was pleurably involved in running errands and watching the Washington Women's Basketball Game with Oregon.

For those of you who know, Amy, Pastor Wayne Taylor's daughter plays for the Ducks, and he has a reputation for getting very emotionally in contact with the game. Not only did I have one of the best seats in the house for viewing the Husky victory, I also had a great view of watching the

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enthusiastic pastor. The game was not at all close in the second half, hence, his emotions did not really seem to get unleashed, the same could be said for the rival Ducks.

So thankfully, I finally found the outpatient admitting and after all that necessary paper work, I was shown to radiology. The marvels of modern medicine are just that. After the CT scan, I was just beginning to get a little anxious in the totally enclosed waiting room when I got the call from the consulting doctor, Dr. Warren (my Dr. Lee is off on Friday) telling me I could go home and to plan to see my doctor on Monday.

That preliminary diagnosis was a slightly enlarged aorta, which may be an aneurysm, but that was not all that clear, nor were the options for treatment. The CT scan showed that there was no leaking into my chest cavity, hence no apparent immediate threat to my life.

With this short diagnosis in hand, I was thankful that the Lord had arranged a trip to Mt. Vernon Friday afternoon. During that drive I also learned that the ringer on my cell phone some way had been turned off, so I could not receive calls there either.

When I got home Friday evening after the clinic closed, I had three more calls from the clinic saying they wanted to set up an appointment with a cardiologist to discuss my options. One stating if I had any heart symptoms to be sure to call 911 and explain my situation. I guess I really didn't know I had a "situation" until that time.

Somewhere in my journeys earlier in the week I ran across a DVD of the movie "Shadowlands" which portrays the life of the great Christian writer, C. S. Lewis. I suppose in our generation we could use the term, "We watch movies, to know we are not alone." Friday night was one of those nights you must endure alone, with only a movie and with God.

I have known for most of my life, that I am going to live forever. When I die that I will go to heaven, not on my good works at all, but on the saving blood of Jesus Christ, who redeemed my condemned soul. But for the first time in my life, I had to come to grips personally with the possibility that this is a transition like no other in human life.

Friday night was a night of relatively peaceful slumber, but very early Saturday morning I again had a dream. In this dream, I, in the company of a small group of undisclosed friends, were travelling across a high barren plain. Essentially flat, no trees, just a landscape of dry grasslands extending a long distance in all directions, but gently sloping down from an apex we were approaching. At the edge of the plateau, there seemed to be some deep canyons all around. In the distance were hills and mountains, but none seemed to be any higher than the prairie on which we were traveling.

As we reached the top of the gentle summit, our party encountered a series of pools of fresh clear water, springing up miraculously. We all jumped in, engrossed in the joy of this wonderful spring.

Then I awoke. I knew I already had my simple vision of heaven, that left me breathless for a day. The barrenness of this plateau was definitely not heaven, it was too bleak, too lifeless, too dry. So this must be a vision of Wonder Springs, that shall guide me the rest of my life. At that time I began to have the peace that there was indeed going to be a rest of my life to live. We are to build a community there, where the water is. For people who might pass over that barren prairie, there they can be refreshed and get an understanding of the goodness of the God who created them.

Natural artesian wells and springs are just water sources caused by water flowing down from the heights, underground onto the surface. This is called a perched aquifer. In this vision there are no heights above, so the springs must come from a source, beyond the understanding of man. That of course is the description of the saving love and grace of God found in Jesus Christ, the source of living water. Even though we can not understand this eternal reality, it does not change its truth, nor the life it brings to our high desert experiences. So from that barren high spring, I claim the blessing that God gave to Job in verses 10-17 in Chapter 42.

As the day progressed, I remembered a section of Bible I had heard on my walk earlier in the week. At the time these words of David seemed important, but Saturday they took on a new importance. They are found in 2 Samuel 22:5-7

*When the waves of death surrounded me,
The floods of ungodliness made me afraid.
The sorrows of Sheol surrounded me;
The snares of death confronted me.
In my distress I called upon the LORD,
And cried out to my God;
He heard my voice from His temple,
And my cry entered His ears.*

These words proceed the last recorded words of David, the sweet psalmist of Israel (23:1). As David goes on from the understanding of death above, he explains how God marvelously rescued him from the afflictions of his enemies, and how through those afflictions he came to understand the magnificence of the LORD.

David uses these stanzas to portray how God saved him from his natural enemies, but if we just focus on the nature of the poetry, we fail to see the ultimate enemy that was trying to claim the life of the king before his time. That threat is death, and I mean threat of death as the only weapon that the enemy of God and man has to use in this world. For if Satan and his minions can make us believe for even a instant, that God's love is not sufficient in any situation, life or death, we then become paralyzed to move forward to fulfill, God's eternal plan for our lives.

In some, that fear may be whether to venture outside our door, or what to eat, or to drink. For others that fear may keep you from becoming an individual after God's own heart like David. But from God's perspective, all of creation flows from His love and His desire to create and recreate mankind in His image. Our choices are ordained within those eternal plans, but the real choice as I have come to understand it, is to choose life whenever possible, and not to fear death. Those gifts too, ultimately come from God, but they lie in the mystery that it will take eternity to unveil, therefore we must accept and endure.

As Saturday began to unfold, my confidence that God seemed to not be as worried about this situation, as I was, seemed to encourage me. I saw blessings I had taken for granted, indeed they became blessings.

One of the most significant was a reference to Pete Maravich, one of the greatest basketball players of all time. Pete accepted Jesus Christ as his Lord and Savior in his thirties, and died playing basketball at forty. As my writing just a week before noted, I too could have been addicted to basketball, except for the grace of God.

I also talked to a member of the family of God, who works in the medical field and I knew had some heart problems and surgery. She shared some of her natural knowledge, but more importantly some greater insights. "Be thankful you have medical insurance and be thankful it didn't happen earlier. When I was going through my toughest time I wrote out a copy of the reported words of David Livingstone, 'I am immortal until God is through with me.'"

Later in the day, I was able to write the ending of this article, which I am now filling in the blanks.

Sunday, I was able to get on the prayer list at church and I was slowly strengthened in God's goodness. I also realized, being the saint I have always been, I now also have a real testimony to share, that makes me by natural definition, one of the church family. I also got to watch about three quarters of the Superbowl, and felt what a waste the whole exercise seemed to be, before I went to church Sunday evening.

Speaking of testimony, as the above paragraph was in final editing, the door bell rang, and you guessed it, it was my local Jehovah Witness pair. I was able to share with them a little of my situation and my faith. It is up to God to completely show them the difference between my God and their Jehovah, but I did have some opportunity to penetrate their world of heaven on earth.

But more important to the narrative, which I had forgotten. Tuesday morning as I was just about to leave to go to my first doctor's appointment, the door bell also rang. This time it was the youthful faces of Mormon missionaries. I have never seen them in this neighborhood before. With them I

really had an opportunity to share more deeply, because I grew up in their midst, and know their techniques quite well. After they left I was encouraged that even though my trying week was just beginning, God still was not through with me. And now, today, I feel that so much more strongly, that this significant event of the time slipped my mind. So God decided to remind me again and share it with you.

Monday morning I made an appointment with my doctor for the afternoon. From there I expect to move forward to consult with experts in the field of vascular medicine. To determine my options and my choices, and then endeavor to choose the option to give me the best possibility of a normal life. As much as it scares me, I think it may mean to share with Kayla Burt, a scar and badge on my body, that states that, "God is not done with me yet." But then again, it may be an invisible badge, just outside my heart, able to be seen only through the miracles of modern medicine that reads, "You must trust in the Lord always."

At about 4:30 Dr. Lee, walked into exam room six, "Well I guess it is time for me to relieve some of the panic you must be feeling. First of all, I think the breathless episode that brought you in here, is unrelated to what we found. One of the miracles of modern medicine is sometimes we find something that can save a persons life, and that is a good thing. Some of the time we find stuff, that perhaps it would have been better if we never knew, for they cause more problems than we can solve. Right now, I tend to think you fit in the second category."

He then went on to explain that my ascending aorta (that is right as it comes out of the heart) is approximately one third larger than normal. How that occurred they do not know, I could have been born with it, or it could be a more recent happening. But the good news is that it now appears to be completely circular with no protrusions, bulges, or weak spot.

I have an appointment with a vascular specialist on Tuesday, February 4th, to explain what he thinks are my options. Dr. Lee said that if he recommends surgery, I should get at least a second opinion. Because if surgery is required, this is about as serious as it gets, but then modern medicine has solutions that can do the impossible. But for now I can resume my normal activities.

So what have I learned from this period until now. Life is precious, and enjoy each day as a gift from God. Life is to short to sweat the stuff we are indoctrinated by the world to think as important. The first thing that comes to mind, because of this last weekend is the Superbowl, but it also filters down to our daily cup of coffee.

I'm also thankful that I had the opportunity to write what follows, which I could have written only because of the experiences of these last few days. I'm not too sure what the words all mean now, but I think they are important, and it is my sincere hope that they will bless your life, as they have begun to bless mine.

The movie "Shadowlands" closes with the following dialog:

"We read, to know that we are not alone."—

"I suppose some people would say, 'We love, to know we are not alone.' Would you?"—

"Why love, if losing hurts so much? I have no answers any more, only the life I've lived. Twice in that life I have been given the choice, as a boy, and as a man. The boy chose safety. The man chooses suffering. The pain now is part of the habitude. That is the deal."

To change the reference at the closing of the book of Ecclesiastes to a more hopeful ending:

Let us hear the conclusion of the matter:

Love God with all your being, and love others not by your limitations, but as God enables you. For this is why man was created.

For by loving God and sharing in the sufferings of His love, then only do you begin to understand the reason for living.

The tangible benefit of Christianity in the world is, no matter what circumstance you may encounter in life, both joy and sorrow, the power and grace of God is with you. From that understanding, or lack of understanding, springs the wonder of it all.

At the darkest time of last week, I told my God, that I choose to live here to the end of time, whatever those days may hold. I cannot choose the time He may call me, but as for me and the house He may give me, in the time that remains, this is our choice.