

August 2, 2015 “A Bouquet of Blessings In A Sea of Darkness and Pain” Ezekiel34:20-31

If this were September you would have before you a bulletin with a sermon title. The title would be, “A Bouquet of Blessings In A Sea of Darkness and Pain”. I must admit I am seizing this moment to share with you something of what I have been through since May the 29<sup>th</sup>. For anyone the word cancer dredges up all kinds of fears and unpleasant thoughts. I have always said I knew too much about Prostate Cancer because I watched my father die as its victim. Pain and discomfort were his lot. His urologist shared with me that there was nothing they could do except make him as comfortable as possible. It was not always possible to make him comfortable.

Times have changed a great deal. And yet for all of that I was not prepared for the diagnosis when Dr Woods shared it with me. You have Prostate Cancer. The tumor is what we call a 7 on the Gleason Scale. That means it is a bad one. It is aggressive. On the other hand it was early. It was isolated. And it was operable. The Scripture speaks of the dark night of the soul. Without going into any details....I have been there. It is a fearful place.

And yet that said, there have been blessings....showers of blessings. The Lord Jesus Christ has been with me throughout the last 6 months and in the midst of the realization of the worst of my fears, I have feasted on the grace of God, and been upheld by His people. Let me be quick to state in the most unequivocal of terms: there is nothing theoretical about the statement, “I am praying for you!” I have been lifted up by those words. I have been encouraged by those words. I have been strengthened by those words. I have wept tears of joy at those words. And I have experienced healing and

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pain's being swept aside by the truth and reality of those words.

The balance of what I am sharing with you this morning comes out of my wrestling with a question put to me by our Clerk of Session, my sister in Christ, Trish

Hupe. She visited me in hospital. I think it was the day after my surgery. She visited me in my home a few days later when I was released from hospital. And she visited me a couple of weeks later. Her question was (and it was asked on her last visit) “What have you learned as a result of this experience?”

It will seem a glib answer....”God is so good! Jesus loves me, this I know. The Holy Spirit's presence has been my constant source of comfort.” How do I know? I can only share that in the light of my experience it seems so obvious. I do not mean I am alive and in this world and that is all that matters. It has more to do with eternity, with God's real presence, the power of His love, and the message of the Gospel which has to do with life and death and eternal life...heaven. In the next 48 hours I will come off pain killers and antibiotics...or at least that is the plan. We will see. Where God leads I will follow. There are 3 tablets left in the bottle of pain killing medication. I was terribly uncomfortable...in pain....last Tuesday and Wednesday. And yet, the blessings are what stand out in my memory.

What blessings? The way everything fell into place. Because things can go wrong, they often do. There was the moment when we (Barbara and I) realized we had not been reached with the message that I needed to drink a solution to have the scans work. When I left the house there was a window of 27 minutes before the

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office closed down at the hospital where I was supposed to pick this solution up. Post surgery there was the moment when I realized I was in trouble. I was on the way to the Choir's social at Alice's home and the pain very quickly went off the map, and we raced to emergency....it was bad....and yet all the pieces fell into place. I was so disappointed when a new catheter had to be installed...and yet I have to say with the late Andre Crouch, “Thru in all, thru it all, I've learned to trust in Jesus, I've learned to trust in God.”

May 28<sup>th</sup>. The evening before my surgery. The “kids” came home to be with me, to be with Barbara. Most of you know I am not very good at this electronic-media-computer stuff. It was just after dinner. We had had a lovely meal together in the quiet of “home”. The Rev. Rebekah

Mitchell, my daughter writes a blog on facebook, it is read by an audience that spans the globe. People in Taiwan read her stuff. People in Israel read her stuff. People all over the States read her blog. A retired air force colonel reads her stuff and laughs and tells me she always reduces him to tears.

Becky said to me (see I don't always refer to her as the Rev. Rebekah)...she said to me, "Dad you have to see this." Facebook. On her Iphone. Photographs of people...the majority of them unknown to me. "Who is this one Becky?" "O I met her at Knox College" "And this one?" She replies, "I think I met her at a Conference I attended on Study Leave...in Atlanta." "Georgia?" I asked. "Ya I think it was Atalanta. You know it's been a while Dad." They have logged on to say they are praying for me and for the surgery on the next day. "Dad you really have to see this." A colleague in Charlottetown Prince Edward Island. Arrone our tour guide in Israel in Jauuary calling on his friends around the world to pray with him for his friend Morley. By bed time there are 85

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postings. I've gone through a pile of kleenex....my daughter holding me as I weep.

Moring of the 29<sup>th</sup>. We were up extra early because we had to be at the hospital very early. I have my plastic wristband in place from the appointment earlier in the week. Barbara sees me through all the routines. When I don't hear...even with my hearing aids....she answers. Apparently they asked me my name and birthdate. I am supposed to prove I am who I am and that I am really with it by answering. Barbara answers for me. The lady on the other side of the glass asks me who she is. I heard that one and got it right. "My wife...47 years." I'm hoping that extra detail clarifies my with-it-ness. They send us and a sheaf of paperwork to the next stage...where I will be asked my name, my birth date and why I am at the hospital...to make sure they have the right body...and to make sure the body has a mind and brought the mind with it today. Thank God for Barbara!!! And then my surgeon appears. He asks me my name, my birth date, and what the procedure is for which I am present. I think I added in reply "God bless you." He smiles and says, "We are all in the hands of the Almighty." I am so glad he understands that. I got to ride into the surgical

suite on the gurney that becomes my operating table. When I woke up...or at least the waking up I remember. I see Barbara. I remember thinking that's all that matters. I think it was the next day she brought some cards that came in the mail. People here, in St. Columba, St. Andrew's Picton and all over the Presbytery are praying for me. I remember Sherry saying to me some days later...might have been 2 weeks later..."Thank God for prayer warriors.

While I was in hospital I remember the nurse taking my  
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blood pressure. "What are the numbers I ask as a matter of routine." "160 over 85," she replies. "That's a little high," I comment. "Feeling any pain?" she asks. "I take a moment to consider. "Nope" I respond. She smiles, reaches across me, hits the morphine pump to give me a hit. She says, "that will bring it down about 40 points." I realize she can tell I am in pain when I literally can't feel any.

When I get home from the hospital, the Clerk of Session from St. Columba calls. At this point Barbara is handling the phones. I only get to speak to people she decides I should speak to. In this case I don't get a chance. Barbara informs me Jane and her husband Gary are going to drop in on us in the evening...I am sufficiently sedated I cannot remember whether it was that night or the next. They have come with a Cancer quilt for me, made and prayed over by people at St. Columba. I share that one because I want you to know how meaningful it can be to be on the receiving end of a physical gift that people produced with prayer and then dedicated with prayer as part of the sending and delivering of the gift. It is not just "nice". It is profoundly and powerfully moving and meaningful. Been there. Done that. God the blanket.

I am still engaged in the healing process. I will be for the balance of this year and part of the next. Though most of the forest is behind me, I am not out of the woods. And yet...and yet I am cancer free. I have a copy of the results of those scans I went through before the surgery listing the organs and systems that are cancer free. The healing process is not done and yet there is no cancer in this body of mine. Blessings.

And I have the privilege of living and working in the midst of a group of people who pray. I do not doubt I am standing here because you among others bore my name and my need before our mutual friend...Jesus. I remember the day I came home from a doctor's appointment to discover Pat Cole's voice on the answering machine. She wanted to know how I was. And she wanted me to know as so many of you have told me, that you too were praying for me, that she was also praying for me.

Every Sunday with the exception of the one on which I was in hospital I have been able to attend worship. When I was not here, I was at St. Columba. I have not had an opportunity to thank people at St. Andrew's Brampton who have communicated their love and their concern by the promise of upholding me in their prayers. It is important to me to share with you that what I learned is that this ordeal has indeed had its dark side, but the light has continually burst through the clouds in the showers of blessings I have received. God is so good. Jesus loves me this I know. His Spirit is sweet, and His Spirit is with us. And you have been the means by which that message has been conveyed so clearly. To God be the glory. Amen