

*“The Lord is my Shepherd. I have everything I need.”*

*(Psalm 23:1)*

A word from the Pastor

During the last nine months I have been practicing social distancing and self-isolation when needed. I always wore my mask and played it safe. Ironically, the day the Feds approved a vaccine I actually was diagnosed with COVID-19. You've got to be kidding me.

Now, I am not a man of little faith. I'm pretty good with the Lord as far as allowing God to be in control and me going with the ebbs and flows of life. Of course, I have some deep questions to ask Jesus when we meet up someday, but with faith, I think I'm good. That is until this past week when all that was challenged. That was until I received the “talk” that I have given to so many people over the years as a Pastor regarding personal medical advanced directives and living wills. I've been hospitalized before but *this* conversation was different and had a new urgency that I have never felt before.

It's important you know that I didn't just end up going to the hospital to be admitted one night. I knew that I probably had Covid when the nastiest of symptoms were very much active in my body - the headache, fever, body aches, chills, and ultimate weakness to even get up off the bed. I went to the ER for the first time to get checked and to officially get tested and see what they could do to help with symptoms. They told me I was positive and gave me some fluids and a regime of Tylenol and Ibuprofen. They were concerned about my RA and didn't know how my system was going to handle this virus but told me to go home any way. Two days later I was back in the ER with severe coughing and the high fever was not improving. This time more fluids, some steroids, and meds for pain. Within 24 hours later I could not breathe well and my oxygen levels dropped to below 90 %. Not good. This time I went to Banner Hospital ER.

This time things were different. There was an urgency. I could feel a bit of anxiety begin to grow deep within me. Was this fear that I was feeling? Someone once told me that the opposite of faith is fear, but I'm not so sure because this faith is so persistent. But what happens when the whole, “I have everything I need” thing comes into question.

Now, you could say that I was admitted into the hospital just to be cautious and to assure my health. That would be the right thing to do, or maybe this was a real decisive action that only allowed for a few options to end with that were really much more complicated. Reality? My body was refusing any sort of medical assistance with regular over the counter meds and fluids. My immune system was not strong enough. I couldn't breathe on my own without large amounts of oxygen. The coughing took every ounce of everything I had to get the junk out of my chest.

So, I was told that that moment was serious. My immune system was failing and I was in trouble. Point blank, “if you quit breathing and lose consciousness what actions do you want us to do to keep you alive?” Now, remember I am alone. No spouse or family. It's God and me and this doctor who is dead serious about my continual care and needs to know how to do her job. Faith. Okay, do what you need to do to keep me going and use my advance directive forms and my spouse's authority over my medical care to my needs as they proceed.

That's all it took. Then the mad dash took place. I was moved to a room with a monitor that watched all my vitals and especially my oxygen levels. The IV's were coming fast... even though I had no veins due to dehydration. They dug around to find one strong enough to work as a pic line. I was given a plasma transfusion, IV antibiotics, IV antibodies, all those experimental drugs the president received, breathing treatments, more meds for cough and pain, and a few extra pillows underneath me to stop the damn bar on the bed behind my back from digging into my already screaming lower back bones.

Then it was silent. Everyone left and I was alone to catch my breath. What just happened? What now? Faith is a strong gift, but fear is a constant reminder that nothing is guaranteed. The doctor came in and basically said that now all we can do is wait to see if my body responds to these new medicines. My two brothers, who are both doctors in the mid-west, were on the phone with our Banner doctors and they made sure I was on every one of those medications that were available to push my body through. The IV drugs were given 5 days in a row to see if they were able to counteract the Covid virus. Anything could have happened. All there was left was that sound of those monitors.

The days and nights were rough. Thank God for Harry Potter and Indiana Jones marathons. I think at one point I thought the young cute girl who was taking my vitals throughout the day was literally Luna Lovegood from Harry Potter with that dense sort of humor. You know, the people who were randomly coming to see me were really what kept me sane. I enjoyed the conversations I had with the respiratory guy who came to see me 4 times a day to give me breathing treatments and make sure I was taking the inhalers properly. In the end I know God was present through every one of these people who became a part of my life that week and through the many prayers I was receiving from you. Thank You!

I wish this experience on no one... even though I'm sure many of you have been in this situation in your life at one time or another. I cannot imagine what it would be like to go through an experience like this without faith and to have that fear consume the bit of hope that does fight through the anxiety. The Lord is my Shepherd... I have everything I need.

AMEN