

December 27, 2021

A Message of Thanks and Gratitude

As I look back on my journey through illness back to health, I would be remiss if I did not take time to thank each person and church for interceding for me. Dorothy Norwood and Alvin Darlin's words express my sentiments best.

*Somebody prayed for me, had me on their mind,
They took the time and prayed for me.
I'm so glad they prayed
I'm so glad they prayed for me.*

We are all living in clay vessels, fragile, yet resilient. From time to time, we need people who will carry our wounded temples of the Holy Spirit to the throne of grace. After suffering a stroke, learning its cause—a cavernoma (a tangle of blood vessels resembling a blackberry, that weakens the veins and arteries), and opting for brain surgery, I found comfort in Mark 2:1-5:

2 When he returned to Capernaum after some days, it was reported that he was at home. ² So many gathered around that there was no longer room for them, not even in front of the door; and he was speaking the word to them. ³ Then **some people** came, bringing to him a paralyzed man, **carried by four of them**. ⁴ And when they could not bring him to Jesus because of the crowd, they removed the roof above him; and after having dug through it, they let down the mat on which the paralytic lay. ⁵ **When Jesus saw their faith**, he said to the paralytic, "Son, your sins are forgiven." (Mark 2:1-5, NRSV, emphasis added)

I have preached and taught this passage many times—I teach a Bible Storytelling course in seminary. As I prepared to go into surgery, I experienced the passage differently. This time, I noticed that there weren't just four people carrying the paralyzed man, a group of people brought him to Jesus, four of whom carried the man. I went into surgery knowing that many people were carrying me into the presence of God through their prayers. I also took comfort in knowing that Jesus responded to the faith of the people carrying the paralyzed man to him. At that moment, I knew that many hands were holding my mat as the doctors operated, navigating through a small corridor of .5 centimeters to get to and safely remove the cavernoma. The faith of many people enabled me to awaken from surgery with no significant pain. The faith of many people made it possible for me to be released from the hospital after only 28 hours!

You may not have known it, but this clay vessel you prayed for had contracted and survived a near death experience with Malaria in 1996, during the first three months of four years of missionary service in Ghana West Africa. This clay vessel contracted and overcame Guillain-Barré Syndrome, a rare, autoimmune disorder in which a person's own immune system damages the nerves, in 2016 (seminary students drove 125 miles one way to pray with me). This clay vessel suffered a torn and detached retina in the left eye and a torn retina in the right eye in 2019. This clay vessel contracted and overcame prostate cancer in 2020 thanks to prayer and new robotic radiation technology available in this area.

Thank you for your gifts, your cards, your phone calls, your love, and especially for "praying for me, keeping me on your mind, and taking the time to pray for me." God bless and keep each of you on this faith journey called life. "The prayer of the righteous is powerful and effective." (James 5:16b, NRSV)

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