

Brainerd Dispatch Church Page—Clergy Article from 10/12/18

Bladder cancer. Never smoked a puff in my life. After almost 40 years of praying for parishioners as they battled cancer of one sort or another, this time I was on the receiving end. I was informed of prayers being offered up for me by lots and lots of my First Lutheran, Aitkin, parishioners. I heard of prayers offered up in my previous parishes. And, I learned that I was included in the prayers of clergy and congregations of several different denominations in Aitkin and elsewhere. Humbling. Gratifying. Amazing. Empowering. Thanks be to God. Thank you to all of those who prayed. Called. Sent cards.

Just a few days before receiving my bladder cancer diagnosis, with no notion of any sort of problem, I thanked God for a great day spent outdoors. I said to my wife, “I have had such a good life. I am so thankful for my family, for all of the wonderful people I have known, for the amazingly beautiful world that I have had to live in. If I died tomorrow, it would be okay. I wouldn’t be disappointed. I would be thankful for the life I have lived and ready to go home to be with God.”

Immunotherapy. They inserted tuberculosis into my bladder. That once dread, deadly disease now served to call my white blood cells into action. While killing the TB, they also killed the cancer cells. No hair loss. No nausea. Little discomfort except during the actual six treatments. Check-ups every three months, one third chance of returning, two clean reports so far. . . Again, thankful. For prayers answered. For medical folks. For science. For research. For money spent trying to care for the needs of people. For team efforts to bring about good in this old world. . . To bring about good.

A whole lot of people, over a whole lot of years, worked ever so hard together to make it possible for me to survive my first bout with cancer. Forty years ago, a cancer diagnosis usually signaled death’s imminent approach. Today, many forms of cancer are treatable and not necessarily death-dealing. The people of this nation, and world, have risen up to battle World War I and II, the Great Depression, the Spanish Flu Epidemic, Polio, Tuberculosis, AIDS. . . Together. . . And God was there too.

Today, together, we face cancer. Today, together, we battle hunger, homelessness, refugee crises, terrorism, environmental degradation, climate change, hatred, violence, drug addiction, mental illness, depression, prejudice, hopelessness. . . And God is there too.

For the most part, the people in our church, and community, treat each other respectfully, honorably. They are courteous. They take the time to listen to what the other person is saying, even if they disagree. They try not to cut on each other. They get a lot of good work done together even though they might find themselves far across the political spectrum from each other. They try to find compromise. They pray for each other. And God is there too.

The world I live in, that I am so thankful for, is far from the kind of world I witness on television, in the lives of many of our leaders, amongst the people who wield unimagined, often totally selfish power. But God is there too. And so, we keep on praying, trusting and working to love the Lord with our whole heart, mind and soul and to love our neighbors as ourselves. God is not going to give up. Neither should we. Thanks be to God.

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