

LEARNING FROM A DETOUR

A year ago this past June I had backpacked with son James to Lake Ethel off the Wonderland Trail on the North slope of Mount Rainier for a fishing expedition. My energy level was high. Then a barium test in July indicated that I had a tumor in my colon which proved to be malignant. A successful operation followed.

From a life escalating with high levels of energy I found myself detoured by my unexpected illness. After two months of convalescence I was able to return to work as part time chaplain. However, this was not the end of my trials.

The cancer had spread to other parts of my body. In January I had a minor operation for breast cancer. Later in the spring a bone scan indicated a malignant growth in my right thigh for which I had five weeks of radiation treatment. Also there was discovered spots in my lungs for which I am currently receiving chemotherapy.

Learning that I had cancer was an initial shock. But one learns to live with one's liabilities. In my situation there have been significant learnings. What I have preached from the pulpit I have learned to live in my life.

My first learning was that there are definite perimeters surrounding our mortal lives. When we were young life was an escalating adventure of limitless possibilities. Illness and the aging process remind us of our mortality. We discover that we are not infinite but finite; that we are not eternal but temporary. The Psalmist puts it well when he wrote:

Man's day are like the grass
he blossoms like the flowers of the field;
a wind passes over them, and they cease to be,
and their place knows them no more. (103:15)

My second learning is that the present is to be celebrated. Recognizing that life is temporary I will celebrate it while I can. I celebrate my body which still functions and keeps me going. I celebrate my occasional pain and discomfort for that means I am alive; I celebrate joy, beauty and love which have enveloped me in a measure never before known during the days of my full health. The love and support of my wife, family and friends sustain and support me.

Finally, my faith has been sustained by hope and a Presence
- a knowledge that I am not alone in my struggles.

The light of God surrounds me
The love of God enfolds me
The power of God protects me
The presence of God watches over me
Wherever I am, God is.

/signed/
Chaplain T. Tom Fukuyama



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