

No Hands But Ours

by James R. Dennis

“God aids the valiant...both to you and to me He will give the help needed.” –

St. Teresa of Avila

Recently, I went through a very dispiriting week.

Three of my friends have been struggling with cancer. The husband of my oldest friend in the world is being treated for bladder cancer at M.D. Anderson. Another very close friend had just been diagnosed with stage 4 throat cancer. That same week, my cousin was treated for the fourth reoccurrence of thyroid cancer.

Each of them has been enduring that ghastly, medieval horror we so unhelpfully call a “treatment”: chemotherapy. Two have adopted children and taken them into their homes. One of them is a single parent. One of them has no insurance, so I have a little skin in the health care debate and I’m terrified for what this might mean for my friend and the family.

I’m not sure why, but way too often the people I love and terminal illness have intersected. All of that provides the backdrop for the week I was



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telling you about. Thursday morning I got a call that a friend of mine, a law school classmate with whom I played lots of golf and lots of 42 (a poor man’s bridge played with dominos), had been killed while riding his bicycle with his 17 year old son. The son had gotten winded and stopped to rest, while Larry rode ahead. A few moments later, his son rode up on the scene of the accident where his father lay dying. My friend Larry was struck by a car driven by a 22-year-old girl, and we’re not sure yet why she veered out of her lane of traffic. Then on Friday, I got another early morning phone call.

Another law school classmate of mine lost his 27 year old son in a bizarre accident.

I reached a couple of thoughts about the gut wrenching kaleidoscope of these events. The first of these is that I may be a bit of a Jonah, and would understand perfectly

if folks were to scootch away or avert their eyes when they see me walking toward them. Second, I think being a friend, being a Christian, is a contact sport. Nothing in this world is harder, or more essential to the Christian life, than being present while someone you love suffers, bearing witness to their pain with them. I think that’s part of the power of the image of Mary at the Cross, watching and aching as her son gives up his life. Seeing these events unfold around me, I’m reminded of something the Tin Man said in the Wizard of Oz: “Now I know I have a heart, because it’s breaking.”

Third, when I heard about my friend Larry’s accident, I actually found the strength, through God’s grace alone and no merit of mine, to immediately say a prayer for the young woman who had struck him. I have no idea how this accident will change her life or the life of her family, but I know she needs God’s presence through this. And somehow, I felt better myself after praying for her.

A couple of years ago, I was asked if I was involved in pastoral care at the church, and I answered that no, I was not. While my answer was honest, I’m not sure that it was accurate. I think all of us are called upon, regardless of what we consider to be our ministry, to be the hands and face of

Notes From the Diaper Pail

by Kelly Harris

Christ from time to time. Maybe these events were just some sort of coincidence. Or maybe, as Einstein once said, "Coincidence is God's way of remaining anonymous."

I think that what might pass in the secular world for caring and compassion is, for us Christians, a statement of our faith. It is our way of cursing the darkness with which this world confronts us, and speaking to the love of Christ and the promise of Easter. As the chaplain of Austin College recently observed, "Easter is not about denial, it's about defiance." Our caring for one another speaks to the power of love to overshadow pain.

Depending on the circumstance, as I have confronted these events, I may not have even mentioned Jesus or faith or prayer. I tend to follow St. Francis' advice in these circumstances, that we should preach the gospel in all times and in all places, but only use the words when necessary. I hope that I won't hear Jesus telling me someday that I did it wrong, that he won't recognize me because I didn't recognize him in this context. I know that it is only through my faith that I can stand to watch people I love suffer, and that I can go on living without making sense of these events. I've begun to believe that, for those of us who follow Jesus, the work of bearing witness to the love of God through moments of pain may be the real cost of taking up the cross. **t**



We begin our nightly bedtime routine with our two-and-a-half-year-old by cleaning up the toys. Actually, my husband and I run around picking up toys while our daughter sings into a toy microphone and watches us. We're tired and ready for our few hours of uninterrupted adult time.

She picks out a few books and we sit down to read. That usually ends up in her playing "I spy" or counting objects on the pages. I am trying to develop her cognitive mathematics skills. (At two-and-a-half.)

We dig out pajamas and change the diaper. I talk endlessly about how "undies" are for big girls and diapers are for babies and doesn't she want to be a big girl? Tonight she says, "No, I want to be a baby." So much for that.

We begin to sing our bedtime songs and she asks for a popsicle. I spout out a well thought-out rational reason as to why she can't have a popsicle but she has moved on to the circus we are going to tomorrow. Will there be any cows there? I listen and then ask for a hug and a kiss. She gives me a big hug and then a half-open mouth kiss on my lips. Wet kisses from

your little ones are truly one of life's greatest gifts.

As I look at her I begin to think about how she is growing and how we are building a beautiful cathedral. She is a little temple to God that we are helping to shape. What an awesome responsibility; no wonder we are exhausted.

As I think about the beautiful cathedrals in Europe, I realize we often don't know who built them. The artists, sculptors, and contractors focused on God's glory and not their own. Likewise, as we constantly mold and teach our children, I realize our focus shouldn't be about us, but about the masterpiece we are creating for God's perfect plan. Even though there are days when I feel like everywhere I turn there is a new stressor, pressure or temptation, we have to be reminded that we have that heavenly help to build those cathedrals stone by stone, piece by piece and day by day.

I close the door and grab the trash bag from the diaper pail. Life can be complicated and messy but it's pretty amazing that we are called to help shape some of the most beautiful cathedrals for futures to come. **t**

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