

Theological Musings from Dave's Laptop

May 14, 2019

A week ago today, I came close to death.¹ In order to set the context, though, I need to back up a bit.

Jill and I traveled to Portland, Oregon on May 1 so we could attend Nathan's graduation from the University of Portland on May 5. At nearly 44, Nathan was the oldest baccalaureate graduate in the large class, and he has made a very good record for himself.



Nathan's father-in-law is a retired Lutheran minister, and Keith and I went to worship in a Lutheran congregation in downtown Portland prior to the ceremony. The crowd was not large, and it was obvious that we were guests, so it wasn't long before the pastor welcomed us and asked where we hailed from.

After hearing that I was from Columbia, a woman asked me after the service whether I might know her brother-in-law, who is a retired Lutheran minister living in Columbia. In a small-world moment, I said, "Well, yes, I do! He's my tax preparer, and he lives about a mile from me."

Even though I was in the middle of chemotherapy for colon cancer, it was important that we be there for Nathan's graduation, and we had very good seats, just above the platform, as you can see. Nathan is smiling partly because I'm

standing there in front of everyone shouting, "He's the oldest graduate!"

Sunday went well, and Monday also. Nathan and I went to dinner on Monday evening, and I went to bed feeling about as usual for these chemo-days. It wasn't long, though, before I began shaking and chilling with fever, and this lasted throughout the night. When Jill tried to wake me the next morning, I was unable to answer questions, and I was unable to walk.

Nathan managed to muscle me into the car and took me to a Kaiser Urgent Care Center in Beaverton. When the physicians there saw how low my blood pressure was and how high my fever was, they quickly put me in an ambulance and sent me to Emanuel Medical Center, a level-one trauma center in Portland.



¹ It was the 39th anniversary of my ordination, which might have been symbolic, somehow.

After a rousing ride with sirens blaring, which I rather enjoyed, I was wheeled into the ER where a roomful of doctors and nurses were ready for me and where a chaplain and a social worker were there to meet Jill. At that point, things began to look more sinister. As Jill put it, I was “circling the drain.”

The docs quickly determined that my potassium level was 2.3, with anything 2.5 or less being life-threatening. They declared that I had sepsis, a systemic infection of some sort, and began pumping me full of potassium and antibiotics. I knew I was pretty sick, but I didn’t know just how sick I was.

By God’s grace, the medical staff got things turned around, and by Thursday evening, I was back in bed at Nathan’s house. Amazing.

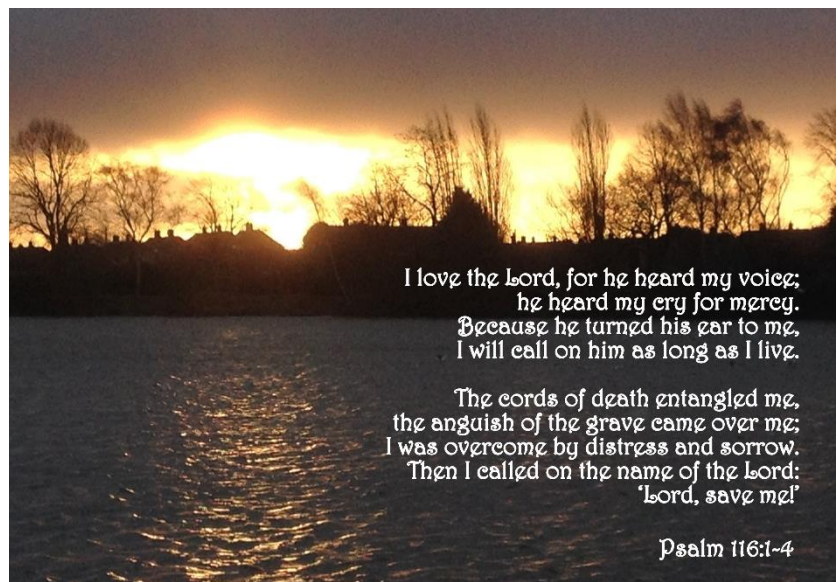
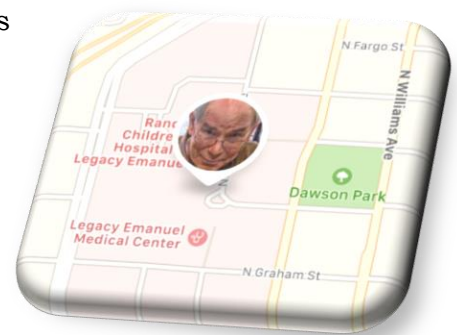
Jill and I have spent much of our lives in hospitals, and we both agreed that Emanuel Hospital could hardly have done things better than they did. Every aspect of my care, night and day, was first-rate.

Even though I was still pretty weak, I was pressed to get home because I was to do a wedding on Sunday afternoon. I had happily bought travel insurance, which paid for first-class seats to BWI on Friday afternoon (at least, I *hope* they will pay for them!!). I’ve decided that flying first-class is how flying ought to be 😊. I was literally the very first person on the plane, sat on the very first row, and was the very first person off the plane.

I was able to do the wedding—at least part of it—because Pastor Andrew was gracious enough to do most of the service, and because Jon Goldsmith kindly came along to prop me up. I was too sick yesterday to begin the fourth and final round of chemo, but we’ll try again next week. I’m not in great shape today, but I’m much better than yesterday.

I write this week to give thanks and praise to God:

The cords of death entangled me; the torrents of destruction overwhelmed me. The cords of the grave coiled around me; the snares of death confronted me. In my distress I called to the LORD; I cried to my God for help. From his temple he heard my voice; my cry came before him, into his ears. . . . He reached down from on high and took hold of me; he drew me out of deep waters (Psalm 18:4-6, 16).



I love the Lord, for he heard my voice;
he heard my cry for mercy.
Because he turned his ear to me,
I will call on him as long as I live.

The cords of death entangled me,
the anguish of the grave came over me;
I was overcome by distress and sorrow.
Then I called on the name of the Lord:
“Lord, save me!”

Psalm 116:1-4