



Mary Carol's Musings

Hopeful Thoughts from Mary Carol Wall

The Theology of Pain

Last time I shared a bit on the Theology of Hurry-Up-And-Wait... I figured I'd muse a bit on the accompanying Theology of Pain, which Jim and friends have termed the Theology of The-Two-By-Four. I have always used a hefty amount of humor to deal with this theology, but today it is bittersweet, for my Mom and Dad have gone to Missouri to be with Aunt Ginny and Kathy and the rest of her children as they prepare to bury Uncle Harold tomorrow.

One of the basic facts about this theology that I have learned, tho', is that we are given gifts as we walk the painful path... gifts that help us walk it, and gifts that are blessing and reward for the journey. Now, mind you, the gifts are not always what we were hoping for... but they are there, and of great value, nonetheless.

For example, the gifts that help us walk the journey: I was sitting here staring at the screen, trying to figure out where to go with these thoughts. I glanced out the window and saw two deer in the near pasture (getting a tad close to the garden!). I watched as they carefully maneuvered two more fences and made it to the hay field, where they began ambling toward the hedgerow. A moment later, a large flock of geese flew over the deer, their shadows startling the deer who stopped and looked up to watch them pass. Cait then called me downstairs to the front door to see a father pheasant with two of his youngsters strutting across our front lawn, just taking their time and enjoying themselves. I glanced above them, and a heron was flying overhead.

Now, by my way of thinking, that was God, throwing an awful lot of kisses on this, my sixth chemo day (and you know how Mommy's kisses always made a hurt better, right?).

I had been very frustrated at times at how long it had taken the medical community to figure out exactly what I had and how bad I had it. But that delay meant that my chemo began in the spring. And every chemo day was sunny and bright, and usually nice and warm (today being no exception). I can't think of a better time to have chemo than in this beautiful season. I try to remember to pray for the folks who had chemo last winter, even tho' it is over... talk about wet and cold and dreary and gray! But, then... maybe it was my perspective at that point!

I have found that through the hardest times, like when we lost our pregnancies, or when we really were choosing whether we spent our money on food or medicine, or when there was fear for the health of someone we loved, or for job security, etc., there were always, always people to love us, sights to cheer us (if we would only open our eyes to see), and so many other ways that God kept us going.

As for rewards for the journey... sometimes that's where the bittersweet comes in. I'll bet you that the men who developed the Twelve Step Program for Alcoholism would never have chosen to be alcoholic. But, because they were, and endured all the loss and grief that goes along with addiction, they were able to

craft a gift that was and is given to millions upon millions of people with addiction problems, and to the folks who love them. Talk about gift! A fierce one, yes... but a life-giving one.

There are many dedicated people working in medicine and research who are there because someone they love suffers/ed from a given disease or condition. What pain and loss! But that drive has resulted in many saved lives, or at least lives that are lived longer in a much more life-affirming manner... and those are people who have more time to share their own gifts. Again... a fiercely won gift, but gift just the same.

I read a book once, about pain and suffering. It opened with the premise that Pain Is Our Friend! It was a startling concept to me, but as I read along, I realized that the author was very right, and very wise. Pain is one of those gifts of God that we are not eager to accept, but think about it... being able to experience pain lets us know we are in trouble.

It is a Caution/Warning/Danger sign. Children who are born without the ability to feel pain die young... they don't realize when they have burnt or otherwise hurt themselves, unless they actually see the injury. They can't feel heat, they can't tell they have stepped on glass, they can't determine an injury has been infected, etc., unless they or someone else sees the damage in time. I have been told that is why leprosy was so disastrous... not so much the leprosy, itself, but because of the loss of the ability to feel pain.

The gift of pain is not just a physical one. When a relationship is causing grief and trauma, or just out and out misery, it is a sign that something needs to change: the ability or style of communication, the amount of time spent together (maybe it should be less!), ways of problem-solving, etc. If something is hurting, then you are being alerted that something is not right. It may even be the relationship, itself, but it is more often a matter of helping it to mature, not end.

So, pain is your friend (like it or not). You are being given gifts to help you navigate through it. You will receive gifts because you accomplished the journey... and in doing so you will also be giving gifts.

There is so much more that can be written on this topic (In fact, I would think some of you sages out there could write some beautiful books and essays on this matter!). However, I will close now, and cherish my memories of deer, geese, pheasants, and a heron, along with enjoying my time with sweet Cait, and head for Corning.

My love to all... God bless,

Mary Carol