

Weekly Health Update from Pastor Jim – Weekend of June 10/11, 2017

Dear Members of St. John

Things have been happening to me very quickly. I received my own stem cells on June 1, which they count as Day 0. From that day, transplant patients are Day plus 1 or 7 or whatever. Every day they take blood samples, about 3 a.m., that's so the doctors know where I am at when they come in. Twice now, I've had to receive supplements, like magnesium and potassium. I have a real itchy scalp and they tell me that is the beginning of losing my hair. My wing at the clinic for transplant is connected to the leukemia wing, and I can walk the two hallways. If I make six round trips of the hallways, I have walked a mile. I have done that now about 4 times. I also have been very nauseous and had one day of vomiting. Fortunately, they can give me something for being nauseous. Otherwise even the smell of food makes me sick. All in all, the care they provide is absolutely amazing. God is so good.

I'm not sure when I first read Ephesians 3:20, but it's one I've marked, scribbled, highlighted, circled and underlined as many times as I can in my Bible. "God can do anything, you know — far more than you could ever imagine or guess or request in your wildest dreams!" Ephesians 3:20 (MSG) It's the verse I go back to, time and time again, when I don't see my plans unfolding the way I think they should ... when I think I have it all figured out, and yet God isn't moving the same direction. Being diagnosed with cancer, I feel like I have to remind God "Hey, God ... I'm over here! Come this way. I have plans! Do it my way!"

If you have not realized it yet or not, let me be the first to tell you, "No ... it doesn't work that way." Often, we make these grand plans and then as the days and weeks go by, we realize we must sit and be patient as we watch His plans unfold for us. Or is may be that God will direct the course of your life in an altogether different direction that you would never have imagined. As one author said, "God will not answer your prayer, when He's got something better in mind."

I have often been weary and confused with life, but I continue to cling to the hope and promise that comes from Ephesians 3:20. God knows what we need even when we didn't. Rest in that promise, friends: The promise of the cross of Jesus Christ always delivers more than our hearts could even imagine or hope for.

Love you with an endearing love. Thank you for your many prayers and rest assured God is answering them in His way and in His time, which is even better for us than our way or time.

Pastor Jim

Weekly Health Update from Pastor Jim – Weekend of June 17 & 18, 2017

Dear Members of St. John

For our dear Fathers, may your day be a special one. I know what an influence my Dad had on me, the values and life's objectives he taught me through the years were very good and some of which I actually did learn.

This week begins my third week here in the Clinic. I reminded of St. Paul's words "... being confident of this, that he who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus" (Philippians 1:6). This passage implies a certain amount of waiting around for God to complete what He began in us. I used to have a button with the letters "PBPWMGIFY." People would look at the button and question what does that stand for? I would answer, "Please Be Patient With Me, God Isn't Finished Yet."

When our dreams lay in shreds or our best plans come unraveled, when our loved ones suffer or our heart aches heavy ... could it be I'm not staring at a faulty finish but merely eyeing a messy middle? When our circumstances look more woeful than wonderful, might God still be at work? This week I am in the middle of the transplant procedure, and my red, white blood cells have hit bottom. My platelets have also gone down so that I had received two transfusions of platelets. But as a result I now have this itching red rash all over my body again with nothing much helping.

The Bible declares God will make all things beautiful in their time (Ecclesiastes 3:11) and that He is working all things for good for those who love Him (Romans 8:28). But when life gets messy and hard, it's easy to doubt these promises for ourselves.

God views every mess as a masterpiece in the making. When our faithful Father looks at our lives, He does not see the bedlam that is, but the beauty that will be. And like many artists around the world, our patient Maker

will not stop mid-design or call it quits in the chaos. According to our key verse, He will finish the good work He's started. God won't give up until it's glorious.

So, next time it looks like the Lord's best plans are falling short, let's fix our eyes on our Maker instead of our mayhem. Let's cling to His promises and stand firm on His faithfulness. If we're struggling to see God's handiwork in the havoc of our lives, we can rest assured of this: If it isn't fabulous, God isn't finished. Remember my button with the letters, "PBPWMGIFY," meaning "Please Be Patient With Me, God Isn't Finished Yet." God loves us simply too much to accept shoddy work or second best when giving us His blessings. God loved us enough to send us Jesus, the very best God could do for us. As St. Paul concludes, (Romans 8:38-39) "For I am convinced that neither death nor life, ...neither the present nor the future. ...nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord."

Blessings,

Pr. Jim

Weekly Health Update from Pastor Jim – Weekend of June 24 & 25, 2017

Dear Members of St. John,

Grief and gratefulness can share the same heartbeat, but they don't always share the same viewpoint. We want to see beyond the grief and sorrow of this life and fix our eyes only on gratefulness for the many blessings that God provides us.

But none of this is possible unless God opens the eyes of our hearts, as Ephesians 1:18 says: "I pray that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened in order that you may know the hope to which he has called you, the riches of his glorious inheritance in his holy people."

On Friday, June 16th, I was discharged from the hospital, grateful for having gone through this whole ordeal. While my blood work showed things were working in a possible way, I also came down with "Engraftment Syndrome," an itchy rash all over my body where your body reacts to the old stem cells being killed off while the new stem cells want to build new bone marrow. It is kind of like a war going on inside your body. So here I am grateful for going home and sleeping in my own bed and grief-stricken with all the itch and scratching. On Monday, June 19th, I had my follow-up appointment with my transplant doctor, and received a very favorable report. My blood work was so good, I did not need to receive any supplements.

God wants to open our spiritual eyes so we can see hope with our hearts. When we see with our hearts, we see blessing and potential tucked within loss and disappointment. When we see with our hearts, we focus on what we have, not what we've lost. We view our situations, our whole lives, through the eyes of gratefulness. And grateful eyes will always see hope. Seeing with our hearts doesn't mean we won't still hurt. It doesn't mean we see everything through rose-colored glasses. Grief is still real, and grief still hurts. But when we ask God to open our spiritual eyes, we see beyond the loss. You may hold unexpected grief in your heart today. Maybe you carry a burden that makes you grateful or a gift that makes you cry. No matter what life looks like for you today, God can help you see it with the eyes of your heart. I know He can, because that's what He's doing for me. When we see with our hearts, hope bursts on the horizon, no matter how cloudy or dark the day. God is the one who opens eyes. He opens eyes of the blind and those who see perfectly but are blinded by disappointment, loss or grief.

So, if what you see discourages you, ask God to open the eyes of your heart and fix them on what is unseen.

"Because what is seen is temporary, and what is unseen is eternal" (2 Corinthians 4:18). God is answering all of your prayers in a mighty way. Keep up the good work.

Love you all very much and miss you even more.

Pastor Jim