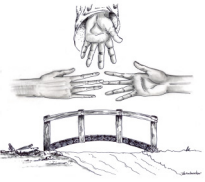


Cross Over the Bridge



"I know that, with God's help and the help of the people he puts in my life, like my family and my friends and my church family, I'll make it. "

Larry and I have been friends since high school, and that's a long time. He lives in another state, and we see each other face to face rarely, and yet we have kept in touch. It's one of those lucky friendships of the kind that when I do see him, it's as if no time has passed since the last time. Somehow, we stay close. One of many things we have in common is being in recovery from the effects of addiction. Many years ago we almost lost our friendship due to Larry's drinking and drug use, and in fact he almost lost his life, as well. We were out of touch for many months. Then one day Larry called and announced, "I've discovered I have this illness called alcoholism. I'm going to AA meetings. One of the steps I need to take to stay sober is to make amends to people I've harmed, and that's why I'm calling." If he'd been closer I would have hugged him. Instead, I said, "Well, that's a coincidence! I've just discovered I have this illness called codependency, from growing up with addiction. I just started going to Al-Anon, and we have the same steps. So, let's take turns with the amends." I had my friend back. I was struck by the coincidence part of it. I was beginning to learn that in my life, God often works by coincidence.

Last week an email from Larry told me he has liver cancer. That hit me hard. My thoughts went straight to the worst case. I was losing my friend to death and didn't feel ready for that at all. More than once I began to answer the email or pick up the phone to call him, but somehow I couldn't. I was scared I wouldn't get it right. I was like a little kid in a family full of conflict who is afraid that if he doesn't do things perfectly, he will lose his family. That's an old and big fear, and when I recognized it I knew I needed help. I had a very lively discussion with God on this point, and that helped some. But though I didn't know it, God had already arranged a string of coincidences which would help more.

Next morning, I had breakfast scheduled with another good friend, who, I realized as I drove to meet him, had been fighting a courageous and successful battle with cancer for many years, and living an abundant life of faith in the midst of it. He reminded me as we talked that at one point cancer had been in his liver, and he'd had very good results from an experimental kind of chemotherapy for it. I got a lot of comfort from talking it over with him. Then, on to the Helping Hands group at Our Savior's. That group is always fun. I had signed up for my turn doing the devotion during our midmorning break, but I didn't have it in me. So instead I told them about my friend, and got more understanding, comfort, and strength, and, I would guess, prayers. That afternoon, I called Larry and we had a really good talk. We made some plans for me to visit him in March or April. As we said goodbye, he told me that my call "made his day." It also helped make mine! The next morning I'd scheduled breakfast with another friend, who has lived well with a form of leukemia for many years. Talking with him helped me more yet. Of course all of these things were scheduled before Larry's email. I now saw I'd had help scheduling them - from a Power greater than me.

I had to smile and shake my head when I learned shortly after that the Christians Sharing Tuesday night support group had been scheduled at the home of one of our members, who also is fighting a very hard cancer battle with quiet courage. The meeting was at his home because his chemo made him too tired and sick to come to the group - so the group came to him. It was a serious and also cheerful gathering in his home that evening, and as people shared, I felt more and more peace come into my own heart.

On Wednesday evenings I am one of the volunteers who help with confirmation classes, and hearing the staff's teachings on God's creation, and what the young people had to say about the wonder and mystery of God's creation, brought me even more peace and perspective.

I don't claim to know how all this works. But I need it, and I'll take it. It seems to me like a little miracle. None of the "facts" have changed, and yet the change is there. It's better. I know that, with God's help and the help of the people he puts in my life, like my family and my friends and my church family, I'll make it. By God's grace I'll be able to be present for Larry and for all of you I love.

*If you know of anyone in need, please contact the pastors
who will lead you to the hand that will help you cross over the bridge*