

A Few Thoughts for the Hunkered-Down

Tuesday, October 6, 2020

“You’ll Figure It Out”

But Barnabas took him [Paul], and brought him to the apostles, and declared to them how on the road he had seen the Lord, who spoke to him and how at Damascus he had preached boldly in the name of Jesus.

—Acts 9:27-28

Welcome one another, therefore, as Christ has welcomed you, for the glory of God. —Romans 15:7

The Haun family is now recovering from a time in the hospital—a time of healing, and a time to be reminded of the many things we hate about those places! Pardon my frankness, and do know that I am aware of the brazenness of that remark. I have all the respect in the world for medicine, and modern medicine has saved our lives several times over, but it still has to be said: we hate being sent to those places. As wonderful a healing place that the hospital may be, there is still so much that I wish was different, and there is a lesson in this for all of us.

By its very nature a hospital is a complex and difficult institution to administer, so it is understandably difficult for such a place to receive and integrate a new patient into its system. One admitted to the hospital enters the place with countless questions. What's going on? Who's in charge? What's next? What's the plan? Who can I talk to? Here begins the biggest complaint that I have with these medical systems. The newcomer wants information, or even some good estimates of what is going on, and such information is sparse or non-existent. Those working around them are often too busy, too caught up in their specific duties, or possibly not much worried about actual patients (though I would not want to paint all hospital employees with that brush). There are also those who explain little or nothing to the admitted patient as they have been instructed to be extremely careful as to what they may say. In an age of lawsuits and fears that all that does not prove absolutely true may be later held against them, silence can become pervasive. The patient may be left with anxiety, anger and a sense of abandonment.

As one who bristles being treated impersonally, hospitals—particularly the first day or two in the hospital—can be highly aggravating. But then I look at the bigger picture and realize that it is hard to run such a large and complex operation, and that the physical care of a patient does come first. Hopefully sooner than later I come to realize that I must put on my big-boy pants and face the situation as it is. This having been said, I still hope that hospitals will learn better patient care, especially of the

informational variety. An informed and oriented patient makes for a better and healthier patient, and it all sounds like a win-win to me. Most of my concern with hospitals has to do with the first 24 to 48 hours—the integration period. Once that time has passed the patient has usually come to understand the system and the plan. A hospital employee may comment, “After a while you figure this place out.” The remark may be true enough, but it is not good enough.

I do feel guilty for holding such critical feelings toward these amazing places of healing, and it has been rightly said that when one points a finger of accusation, four remaining fingers point back at the accuser. True enough, and my recent critical reflections have set me to thinking about my own callousness toward hurting and confused people. You see, I happen to be a part of an even more amazing house of healing: the Church! People come to Church for a reason, and that reason is often wrapped up in a lot of pain and searching. When people ask just who it is we serve at *Lunch with Luke* I frequently explain that we often feed folks who are physically hungry, but far more frequently we feed folks with other hungers. We serve those who need to get out of their lonely apartments and to be among friends. We serve those who are looking for connection and community. We serve those who carry the pain of difficult life and family situations. As I think back over those special Wednesdays, I realize that I could spend more time among our guests and keep a more careful ear tuned to what some of these folks are experiencing.

Sunday morning is another time when we have a chance to receive the hurting and confused. Folks who visit a Church often come out of real and specific needs. They are looking for hope and help. As those familiar with the routines of Sunday morning worship and the traditions of St. Luke's we easily forget how confusing this can all be to a newcomer. We commonly assert that we would never want to be too forward or overbearing with a visitor, and in this commitment to minimal intervention we miss an opportunity to offer helpful information which can put a visitor at ease and make them feel at home. One can greet a visitor with a gentle overview of our present COVID practices, and how we truly want to be family despite the distancing! We can always tell a visitor that we kneel in our worship service, but that they don't have to if they are not comfortable with the practice. We can explain that the preacher *is* long winded, but that his wife is a real gem and that makes up for it. Such shared information can take some of the mystery and anxiety out of a visitor's experience, and it is a great way to show that we really care. We dare not say or even think, “Keep coming around and you'll figure it out.” Hospital admissions have little choice but to stay. Visitors can easily vote with their feet.

Like Barnabas who quickly perceived the recently converted Paul's alienation from the leaders in Jerusalem, we need to become more sensitive to connections which need to be made. And like Barnabas, we need to have a heart for the stranger. It is all too easy on a Sunday morning to lose our nerve, to feel too busy with our own duties, or to feel too tired to care at that moment. I myself have dropped the ball on numerous

occasions. We are blessed to be a part of the greatest healing institution that this earth has ever known. May we all be on alert that we may effectively admit and orient the hurting who come to this great hospital for souls. These “new admissions” are in more of a fog than we realize, and a few words of guidance can make all the difference.

Blessings,

Pastor Jim

O Lord, baptize our hearts into a sense of the conditions and needs of all men. — George Fox