

Home, the Long Way 'Round

I've recently had cause to reflect on my mortality. I can now count myself amongst that (rather large, as I am finding) cohort of people who have had the doctor gaze and use the "c-word." In my case, it's bladder cancer.



In my situation, while there are some unknowns remaining, there is not cause for great concern. From the moment I saw blood in my urine (if you see it, get it checked!), the time to having a wonderfully acronymised TURBT operation was less than a month. It was a large tumour but caught quite early.

All signs are good for a full recovery with minimal subsequent treatment, and we'll know for sure after an appointment next week. God bless the NHS!

But it's made me think, of course. Despite the fact that my particular cancer journey is merely a tiptoe to the front gate compared to the epic expeditions of some... I'm 41 years old, and mortal, and now very aware of that fact.

There are three components to my musing:

Firstly, I'm not afraid of dying. I'm really not. *1 Thessalonians 4:16-18* is a comfort, and I can echo that wonderfully defiant hope-filled proclamation from *1 Corinthians 15*: **"Where, O death, is your victory? Where, O death, is your sting?"** I *will* be raised on that last day, if our Lord does not return first.

Secondly, I *do* have some worries, and they are about those who depend on me, most fundamentally my family. I manage this anxiety by returning to a truth that I have had to fall back on a number of times as a husband and father: God is trustworthy. Sometimes I feel the answer to my anxious prayer

is a divine “Do you trust me with them, or not?” And that pokes until there is life-giving movement.

Thirdly, within myself, my response is this: I’m not done with my life yet. Yes, I know my life is not my own, and there are always acts of fate and providence that I cannot control. But it’s my reaction to a real and present sense of mortality: I don’t want to shortcut, I want to get to the goal the long way ’round.

You’ll have to forgive my nerdiness, because I’m referencing *Doctor Who* here. In the episode *The Girl in the Fireplace* the Doctor jumps from point to point in a woman’s timestream. She realises what’s going on: that he goes the “short way”, moving from decade to decade in a blink of an eye. But she “takes the long way ’round”; she lives her life to the end. It all happens because of clockwork robots, of course, because, well... Doctor Who.

But my point is this. I want to live life, the long way ’round. I want the good times and the storms, because blessed is his name. The *fading like autumn grass* is a felt reality, so I don’t want to waste the summer sun, but get on with obeying the truth and sincerely loving according to the enduring word of God. The thought of missing out on all that, whether life be a fight or a cruise, produces a regret in me and makes my mortality more foe than friend.

There are times where, like *Paul*, we long for heaven, and groan even more for the resolution of all things at the end.

I think there are some who might feel rightly cheated if I were to enter into my rest before the work was done and the trials were ended! But nevertheless, this transitory life has the very depths of value, even and especially in the work and the trials it brings. And so my aspiration, resolve, my longing, becomes this: Bring it on. Let’s get there the long way ’round.

[UPDATE, 3/8/16] We have now had the follow up appointment and the news is good. The CT scan was clear and the tumour has not spread. The histology shows that it is a slow-growing form of cancer, and therefore not highly aggressive. I will not need any further treatment except for regular checks for the next five years and intervention if required. Apparently (according to the doctor's bladder cancer app!) there is a 24% chance of the tumour recurring in the next year, and a 40% chance of it recurring in the next five years (which is a little concerning, but not a problem with regular checks). There is a smaller chance (less than 1%) of it developing into a more aggressive form. [/UPDATE]