

When Doctors Jump through Windows

Amanda Grant

As I write this blog I am sitting at the Indian Ocean. My feet are in the water and the tide is getting closer with every word I write.

These hours at the beach are much needed. Having an opportunity to reflect on this last week was and is essential.

As the week ended, I was left with more questions than answers. In the questions, though, I have learned a prayer of thanksgiving.

I thought I knew how to pray a prayer of thanksgiving. I had done so my whole life but this week.... As I think back on the week and as the waves of the Indian Ocean wash over my soul my prayer has drastically changed.

For the past several weeks, as my house was being readied, I lived with friends at the Rainbow School. I loved my time staying with Caroline and her family. Her children are wonderful and have helped me with my Swahili.

On Monday I was able to move into my place and begin to get settled. As I was unpacking in my new house I began to feel weaker and weaker. Knowing that I was not feeling like myself I asked to go to the doctor. The staff at SEKUCo [Sebastian Kolowa University College] jumped into gear and took me to the hospital.

The response of my co-workers was heart warming. But what I was to see is enough to break a heart.

I was taken to the district hospital, a nice building by much of the world's standards. When you entered there was a waiting room with about fifty people sitting and lying on wooden benches. There was no electricity at that moment and it was hard to see the person next to you.

I sat waiting for a short time, about 40 minutes, before beginning to be processed through the system. I was taken into a room, given an identification card and asked what tribe I was from. My response was simple "I have no tribe." The man looked at me and said, "That is not true; everyone has a tribe." With a small smile I said "Well Lutheran of course." I was given a number and sent back to the dark room.

Almost immediately I was called to have tests done. It was clear that I was being pulled to the front of the line because I am a Mzungu (White Person). I was given my tests and then taken to the doctor's office. The office was not bigger than 5 feet by 10 feet with a desk, cabinet and a long wooden table. There was a window frame but no window or screen. The doctor informed me that I had malaria and he was going to give me something to take care of the infection.

What the doctor said next was drowned out by the sounds of car horns. He thrust my prescription in my hands and threw his whole body out the window, yelling as he went. I waited in the room just in case he needed to talk to me again but when he came back he had a child with him that was so badly injured that he did not even move. He placed the boy on the wooden table and started calling out directions. In this room with nothing, no extra blood, no light, and none of the technology that is seen in the States he started his work.

I walked back out to the waiting room and it was clear that there had been a bus accident. A bad accident. A small school bus had been hit by a larger passenger bus.

Children were brought in first. There was blood everywhere. I saw parts of children's bodies that I never want to see again. I sat next to a woman who was bleeding from her skull. She was not crying or sad but was just sitting. Peacefully sitting. In my broken Swahili all I could say was "I will pray for you." A little later I filled my malaria prescription and went home to rest.

Malaria makes you so sleepy that it is hard to move. I slept most the day but was haunted by the images lingering in my mind. I know that if I ever get really sick or injured my insurance will fly me to the closest "established" hospital within 24 hours. But not the woman I sat next to or the children I saw. I know that we have health care issues in America but we have more than a waiting room with wooden benches and no light. Now as I sit at the beach and sort through my questions of equality, of skin color, of healthcare systems and of tribal identification I am surprised – I have a new prayer of thanksgiving. A thankful prayer for the water of the ocean that baptizes my soul with the peace of God's grace, for family around the world, for health and the ability to receive appropriate health care, for friends who called to check on me, for my community at St. John's Lutheran Church and throughout the Synod, for those who dare to make justice against great odds — and for discovering God's faithfulness even as life ebbs on a bench in a hospital Southeast of Mount Kilimanjaro.

The thought of my affliction
and my homelessness is wormwood and gall!
My soul continually thinks of it
and is bowed down within me.
But this I call to mind,
and therefore I have hope:
The steadfast love of the Lord never ceases,
God's mercies never come to an end;
They are new every morning.
Great is God's Faithfulness.
"The Lord is my portion," says my soul.
"Therefore I will hope in God."
The Lord is good to those who wait,
To the soul that seeks.
It is good that one should wait quietly

For the salvation of the Lord.

The above text is from Lamentations 3:19-26. As I read it, I remember and invite you to remember my neighbor on the bench at the hospital, sitting in silence, bleeding, waiting. And, sister on the bench, prompted by this blog, may the prayers of many surround you and all who rode the buses on that day.

Amani,
Amanda

Presbyterian elder Amanda Grant is a lecturer at Sebastian Kolowa University College in Magamba, Tanzania. She was appointed by the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America as part of their mission team.