

Wm Blake Spencer      Another Bush Burning

"Rae, are you not ever afraid because you believe in God?"

"I am sometimes, but I have company."

"You mean because you feel like God is with you?"

"Uh-huh."

"I think I'm a Christian," said Rosie. "Except for the Jesus part."

She heard Rae give a quiet laugh through her nose. At first Rosie felt worried that Rae thought she was stupid, but then she could tell that Rae was just making that little laugh because she loved her.

**Anne Lamott wrote those words and I read them while sitting in the area of the hospital named the *family room*, a room across the hall from the Cardiac Vascular Intensive Care Unit.**

I sat there long hours this past week waiting with and watching various families huddle together in clusters of chairs: whispering, laughing, crying, sharing stories...all the while as their loved one, on the other side of the double doors, struggled to recover and wrestled to stay alive.

**All day, everyday..... people overwhelmed with concern and filled to the brim with compassion sat shoulder to shoulder.**

**At various intervals Doctors and nurses would come into the cloistered room to offer a report. We all ended up hearing parts and pieces of each other's stories....**

And with each story we slowly began to know each other....those of us waiting in the *family room*. We learned that several of the women had been waiting in the windowless corner of the hospital for 20, and 30 days and more....sleeping, resting, and visiting in between visiting hours.

They were as tenacious with their waiting as the Doctors were in their treatment....as their patients were with their healing.

**We didn't just overhear each other's news. We began to update each other with details.**

**He sat up today.**

She's not doing too well today; the Doctors have different opinions as to what to do.

**He walked down the hall today; we hope we will be moving to a regular room very soon.**

One late morning I came out from visiting my father and found my mother talking with two young people....a brother and a sister. I had seen them at the side of the bed of the woman next to my father. The woman was their mother.

She couldn't talk....so they pointed to letters on a card and diligently deciphered her answers....always smiling at her with each response.

**I had come out to go with my mother to lunch. Before leaving mom said to the young man and woman, "I sure hope your mom doesn't have to wait long." And with those simple words they hugged her as if they had known my mom their whole lives. Tight, hard hugs they offered with deep, deep appreciation.**

In the *family room* at the end of the hall on the 3<sup>rd</sup> floor of the Fondren building on Fannin Street in Houston, Texas....we met so many people; all of us standing in a moment of life causing us to ponder what is most important....causing us to remember what was and what could be and what hopefully would be.

**Maria sat in the 3<sup>rd</sup> recliner in the corner near the cabinet where clean blankets are stored because most days the temperature in the room hovered around 68 degrees despite the 107 degrees outside. From time to time you needed a blanket.**

Maria's husband had just received a lung transplant – after having waited for months because he's so tall.....and finding a lung suitable for his body size is a challenge to say the least....

but they did find a lung because another young man had taken the time to check that little box on the back of his driver's license...and because he did Maria's husband has a second chance at living.

**Maria is still sitting in that *family room* as we worship here today. She will be there until her husband's body learns how to accept and use his new lung. She waits....but now it's good waiting....waiting with tangible hope.**

I told another woman whose husband also had a lung transplant that I would share their story with you today....that we would lift them up in our prayers. She seemed so pleased, so relieved, so touched. With a smile she said, "You don't know what it means to not have to do this alone."

**Maria said the same thing. At least we are not alone. It's amazing all the differences among people that usually make a difference doesn't in the *family room*. It simply doesn't matter who you are or where you are from.....we reach out to each other and that is all there is to it.**

There we all were – as many others before us have been and as many others are right now.....standing in a moment in life sorting out what matters most.

**I suppose you could say we were in a "burning bush" moment....looking deep into life...trying to see, hear, and sense the holy, trying not to be afraid as we reached out to each other....trying to hold on to something bigger than our fear....wider than the grief threatening to erode our hope.**

There we all were....standing in a "burning bush" moment hoping for *something* to meet us and invite us to a different place.

**Come closer....God spoke to Moses. Take off your sandals for where you stand is holy ground. Come closer, take of those things that bind you and hold you back....put down those things you carry.**

**Come closer and peer into my being. It will only take a glimpse for you to grasp the enormity of my power and grace.**

Come closer – I am who I am – and all I desire is for you to be you.

Open what has been closed. Live into all that seems overwhelming.

Listen and breathe.

And you will know. Listen and Breathe. Breathe and Listen.

**In times of crisis, in those moments when normal daily habits are interrupted...all that matters at the end of the day is that we are sitting together breathing and listening to something other than the concoctions of our fear.**

(Pause...)

I've tried to listen to these words all week long. Listen and Breathe. I didn't do so well....and come about Friday morning the concoctions of my fear were getting the best of me. I couldn't sit in that family room one more second. So I got up and went walking.

**There's a lot of room to walk in that hospital. Sky bridges and tunnels connecting building after building. Up one floor down another.**

**Thousands of people work and walk in the Houston medical center.....80 thousand all together.....and last week I was one of them.**

On Friday I walked and walked and walked and ended up in the chapel....which is really the size of a full fledged sanctuary. Each Friday a Catholic Mass is offered....so I sat and waited for worship to begin. My surroundings were familiar....pews, and candles; stained glass, organ pipes, hymnals and Bibles. I sat preoccupied with angst that would not stop nagging me. I kept worrying about my father and about the future.

Remember to breathe my friends voice echoed in my head....so I did and calmed down a bit.

**About 20 had gathered. The lay leader sat in the pew across the aisle and announced that we would sing song #108 when the Father entered. He entered and we sang....just our voices.....slowly and in a low key.**

**"Praise ye the Lord, the Almighty, the King of Creation..."**

I had expectations that the words of Scripture, the ritual, the motions, sounds and smells would help fill me with the peace I was hoping to encounter.....but it didn't.....the angst was tenacious and would not let me go.

**I listened to the words the priest spoke.... "Submit....we are not worthy.....and yet we receive the very life we are seeking, and longing for."**

Submit.....that word kept ringing in my head.

But I have....I said loudly to myself. I have. I've submitted about all I have and I am.....so now it someone else's turn....something else needs to happen.

**I suppose I stopped listening at this point....and started talking. I left before Mass ended. I walked out as the others walked forward to receive Holy Communion. I left empty handed for a number of reasons.....and empty hearted because I was tired.....and afraid.**

I gave up for the moment....the quest to change the condition of my heart....I gave up and went to eat lunch with my mother. She too had been rattled that day....so we sat and shared a hamburger and muttered some words and watched all the other people moving about. **The cycle of living in the hospital from one visitation hour to the next just kept on ticking.**

**Come....God said to Moses. Take off your sandals and come closer.**

**It was one of those burning bush moments.....and I wasn't in much of a mood to move closer. I had no sandals to take off.....I didn't know what else to put down.**

**It was one of those moments.....when I needed a glimpse of something bigger than the concoctions of my fear.**

And it would come.....slowly again....the words and compassion found in the *family waiting room* greeted me that afternoon.....and the love we shared brought alive the ritual of the chapel worship.....the love we offered opened the way for peace to seep in.

**I wonder if Sanctuaries can become more like Family Rooms in hospitals where people wait together.....where people seek together something deeper and wider than the concoctions of our fear.**

**I wonder if worship can become as meaningful and healing as the words shared between two people, two families standing in a moment of crisis.**

I simply wonder.

They are there today.....families in the family room waiting....they are there today.....saying to each other.... "I am afraid sometimes....but I have company."

"You mean, because you feel like God is with you?"

"Uh-huh."

Amen.