



National Cancer Survivor Day



[sur • vi • vor]

To beat the odds, one with great courage and strength, a true inspiration



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REV. DR. DEBRA J. HANSON

Welcome

Prelude

Scripture Romans 8: 35, 37-39 (CEV)

Can anything separate us from the love of Christ? Can trouble, suffering, and hard times, or hunger and nakedness, or danger and death? In everything we have won more than a victory because of Christ who loves us. I am sure that nothing can separate us from God's love—not life or death, not angels or spirits, not the present or the future, and not powers above or powers below. Nothing in all creation can separate us from God's love for us in Christ Jesus our Lord!

Message "We Never Walk Alone"

Today is National Cancer Survivors Day. The ribbons (on the front cover) represent the many types of cancer that have affected people - there are so many here. Cancer is an insidious disease that can be devastating. It affects not only the person who receives the diagnosis, but the families, friends, workplaces, and communities where people live. Yet, today, the diagnosis of "cancer" doesn't always bring a death sentence. We give thanks to God for thousands of researchers, doctors, nurses, and caregivers who have helped to bring healing and wholeness to those who have cancer.

Our Romans passage reminds us that God is with us always, that nothing - NOTHING - will separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord, and that includes cancer. When someone hears the word "cancer," most often, their immediate thought is that they could be facing death, and certainly, history reveals that many, many people have died from cancers of some kind, as our ribbon board shows. I'm sure that every one of us knows someone who has had cancer or have had it ourselves.

This day (and every day!) is a time to celebrate the courageous battles that survivors have fought as they went through difficult treatments, emerging victorious. Many survivors report that they descended into a deep, dark place when they heard the diagnosis. The journey was long and sometimes agonizing, but they often remark about the strength they found from those who walked with them on that path: husbands, wives, friends, church families, medical staff, volunteers who are there to encourage them, and support groups formed especially for their type of cancer – companions on the journey.

God's presence becomes more real, even in the darkest times, and so many people have talked about how their faith grew stronger as they trusted God to be with them, giving them strength, and often carrying them when they felt too exhausted and weak to keep going. But they did get through it all, and they felt triumphant in finding healing and renewed health. Here are some of the comments from survivors who shared how life was different for them after conquering their cancer (*from the American Cancer Society*):

“I dance with zeal, laugh until I can't anymore, and step outside to breathe and remind myself I'm alive . . . My faith is stronger than ever, and I will never stop thanking God for the one invaluable gift I have been given – my family!”
(Ashley Jobe)

“I cherish my friends and family who have given me their never-ending support and love.” (Jana-Lynn Kam)

“I'm a physician, and I stepped onto the other side of the patient-doctor equation when I was diagnosed with cancer. I know now what it's like to be told you have cancer, what it's like to wait for the phone call with your latest CT scan results, what it's like to feel your heart sink. I'm a better physician – person – for it.” (David Posner)

“Life is different after cancer because my priorities have completely reversed . . . When one is faced with death, you suddenly realize what matters and what doesn’t . . . you must make the most of your life while you can.” (Buck Usher)

“. . . never again will the simple act of waking up to a normal, boring day as a healthy individual be taken for granted, nor go unappreciated.”
(Allison A.)

Gratitude, joy, appreciation, celebration: these are just a few words that describe what we hear from those who are cancer survivors. A man named Willard had a diagnosis of cancer, and he shared his thoughts during a sermon at his church about what cancer **cannot** do. Cancer cannot:

- *Cripple love
- *Shatter hope
- *Corrode faith
- *Eat away peace
- *Destroy confidence
- *Kill friendship
- *Shut out memories
- *Silence courage
- *Invade the soul
- *Reduce eternal life
- *Quench the spirit
- *Or lessen the power of the resurrection.

(from “What Cancer Cannot Do,” sermon preached by Pastor Bill Sullivan, March 28, 2004, found on Sermon Central)

Some cancer patients say, “I had Cancer, Cancer never had me.” (from the American Cancer Society website) Having hope, determination, and a positive attitude makes a difference in progress and recovery, and the love and support of family and friends brings encouragement and hope.

Having trust in God who walks with us, who sends people to be our companions on the journey, and who has given gifts of care and healing to the medical community gives us strength and assurance that we don't take this journey alone. As Romans 8 reminds us: nothing, NOTHING can separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus.

The Message Bible writes verse 39 this way: "I'm absolutely convinced that nothing—nothing living or dead, angelic or demonic, today or tomorrow, high or low, thinkable or unthinkable—absolutely nothing can get between us and God's love because of the way that Jesus our Master has embraced us."

Cancer cannot separate us from God's love, **ever**. Faith is believing that God is with us, giving us hope to keep on keeping on and to appreciate the gifts we have been given. Willard's list reminds us that cancer cannot corrode faith. He shared these thoughts with the congregation:

"I want no one ever to say to me - if you had enough faith, you wouldn't be sick. I never want anyone to put that condemnation on me, because God doesn't - that it's my fault, because of lack of faith that I'm sick . . . That's such a shallow understanding of faith. Faith is not a quick fix faith. It's an abiding faith . . . faith that stands . . . that's still there when you don't get what you ask for . . . a faith that's been tried and proven to be steadfast . . . I don't believe God allowed this to happen to me. [We still live in] a sinful world, [and cancer happens] . . . This is a faith you can depend on whether you're sick or well, that endures through good times or bad times, a faith that says to God, "I can trust you no matter what happens." (Citation from Pastor Bill Sullivan's message listed above)

Willard knew that nothing - NOTHING - separates us from the love of God, including cancer. Cancer survivors are living proof that cancer can be beaten, that second chances at life are possible, and that the support, love, and encouragement from others help them to keep going. Story after story from cancer survivors remind and inspire all of us to live our lives as children of God, called to appreciate our lives, those in our lives, and the world around us, witnessing to our faith.

No matter what any of us is facing today or will face tomorrow, let us remember that God loves us, is with us, we don't walk alone in our lives. Not only do we have the presence of God with us, but God has sent companions for the journey. Nothing - NOTHING - separates from God's love in Christ Jesus, our Lord! Hallelujah! Amen.

Prayer (by Lesli White)

Lord, our eternal relationship with you began from the moment we first believed. We don't need to work for it, and we don't need to hope it will come to pass someday. Our lives in you are a done deal, not based on our feelings, our struggles, or even cancer. Forgive us for the times we falter, and help us to trust that you will carry us when weak and send others to walk with us on the journey. In you, we live and move and have our very existence. Thank you for your assurance that we are your children and you will never leave or forsake us. Help us to comprehend what this new life in you actually means, through good times and bad, in health and in sickness. Thank you, Lord, the Giver of Life! Amen.

Lord's Prayer:

Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name, your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as in heaven. Give us today our daily bread. Forgive us our sins as we forgive those who sin against us. Lead us not into temptation but deliver us from evil. For the kingdom, the power, and the glory are yours now and forever. Amen.

Holy Communion

Hymn "You Are Mine" (FWS #2218)

Sending Forth



WE LIFT UP IN PRAYER

Juliann
Joan Allen
Naomi
Erin Frane
Madeline
Charles Gilman
Josh Jones
Jenn

Harry Junkins
Marilyn & Gil
Donna Smith
Sophia
Bobbie Noble
Dan Strange
Danny Westbrook

Christine & her parents
Those in nursing and assisted living care
Our Church family



WHO WE ARE

FUMC PORTSMOUTH A RECONCILING CONGREGATION

We, the congregation of the First United Methodist Church of Portsmouth, New Hampshire, are dedicated in worshipping, learning, and serving with all people as we embrace Jesus Christ's message of love and acceptance. As a United Methodist Church we stand fully behind the statement "Open Hearts, Open Minds, and Open Doors". We celebrate our diversity and invite all persons regardless of age, gender, racial or ethnic background, sexual orientation, marital or socioeconomic status, nationality, physical or mental ability into full membership and participation in the life of this community of faith.



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