

**Chaplain:** Robert Baral

**Patient:** XY, 60+ year old female, widowed

**Time of Visit:** 11:10

**Length of Visit:** 60 minutes

**Type of Visit:** Inter Disciplinary Team referral

**Location of Ministry:** medical surgical unit

**Title:** “Tears of lament and praise at end of life:

O GOD, I should be crying, but here I am only praising!”

**Diagnosis & Prognosis:** Pt has advanced Stage IV cancer that spread from the breast to her bones. Terminal. Plan is to continue to make pt comfortable, discharge home on Hospice.

**Peer group focus:** Immediate Praise Talk can suppress Lament & Confession Talk.

### **Introduction:**

XY is a 60+ year old lady sitting upright in bed in single room. I knock on the door and she welcomes me in. Bed faces window on left, which gives a wide view of the valley and some of the surrounding green hills. She has a somewhat complicated brace on her left arm, which is partly visible. The button for her IV narcotic pump machine is next to her left hand. Her right hand is swollen and about twice the size of her left hand.

### **The Players and The Text**

P – Patient. C – Chaplain.

P1 – [Pt looks up at me.] I can't move my arms. Just give a gentle hand nudge. [Pt smiles, opens right hand. I gently tap her fingers with mine.]

C1- Good to meet you, Mrs. Y. I am Chaplain Bob. I am the hospital Chaplain on this floor today. I'd like to offer to spend some time with you. Can I have a seat here?

P2 – Please. Pull up a chair.

C2 - [As I move to the chair, I stop to look out the window at the view.] What a beautiful view you have of the hills around the town here!

P3 - It's so lovely! Are all the towns around here like this?

C3 - I think there's a lot of small valleys like this that are surrounded with these kind of beautiful hills here.

P4 - It's more noticeable here in this town. I wonder why that is?

C4 - Maybe because the valley here is smaller. So the surrounding hills are closer and more noticeable. I think a lot of little towns in valleys in this State are like this one. [I pull up a chair and sit next to pt. We look out the window together for a few moments in silence. We look at each other and smile. I sit down.]

P5 - [2 Nurses come in and attend to the pt's IV.] Everyone here is so nice. All the Nurses really care. They're not just in it for a job.

C5 - I agree!

P6 - They really seem to care. They are GOD's angels.

C6 - Sometimes, when I hear someone tell me that there is no GOD, I think of people like the Nurses here, and think to myself, they are GOD's angels, which means that GOD is!

P7 - My husband was Catholic and I am Protestant. [Pt describes her family, a mix of Catholic and Protestant, and that Faith is very important to her.]

What Faith are you, Bob?

C7 - I'm Christian. As a hospital Chaplain, we offer to see people of all Faiths and no Faith.

P8 - There is only one GOD.

C8 - I'm thinking of "Hear, O Israel, The LORD is our GOD, The LORD alone!"<sup>1</sup> There is only one GOD.

P9 - I'm so glad you came to visit me! [Pt looks down at a small piece of graham cracker on her gown. She looks up and smiles at me.] I was eating a cracker when the Doctor came in to see me, and it fell there! I can't move my arm to pick it up!

C9 - So I see! And I am happy to be able to visit you. [I make myself comfortable.] So what problem brought you into our hospital?

P10 - I have bone cancer in my one arm. It started in my breast. My Doctor says it will spread to the other arm. I can't move my hands because my left arm is broken and my right arm has a blood clot.

C10 - I see you have an impressive brace on your left arm. [Mrs. Y jokes about the piece of graham cracker stranded on her gown. We stare at it for a moment, then look at each other. She smiles. I remain silent...]

P11 - I cared for my husband, my parents and my brother-in-law for years at home before they died. I didn't take care of myself. I neglected myself.

C11 - What makes you say that?

P12 - I just didn't look out for myself enough. I was always working. There was nothing wrong with me until 2 years ago. Then I got this cancer.

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<sup>1</sup> NAB, DEUTERONOMY 6:4. "The SHEMA."

C12 - It sounds like you really gave yourself for your family. And you've been through a lot with this cancer.

P12 - Maybe I wore myself out at work. I wonder if that has something to do with this cancer.

C13 - How is that?

P13 - I worked in a coat hanger factory for 30 years. Tedious work. Always lifting up and doing work with my arms every few seconds.

C14 - You wonder if you wore yourself out caring for your family and at your work.

P15 - My husband died in 2002. My father-in-law in 2007. My parents in the late 1990's.

C15 - That's a lot of loss.

P16 - [Pt shares about her care of them through the years. She focuses on her husband.] I miss my husband... [Pause. She shares about her married life... Silence. Her smile has faded.]

C16 - You miss him...

P17 - We were married for 19 years. But we went together for 34 years all total. [Pt shares a romantic story of how she and her husband met and dated and married. No mention of children.]

C17 - That sounds very beautiful and romantic!

P18 - Yes. It was. [Pt smiles]

C18 - I am wondering what you are think about ?

P19 - To go home, maybe on Hospice....

C19 - Who's at home to take care of you? Do you have children?

P20 - No kids. We were married late. My sisters and brother will take care of me.

C20 - That will be a reverse for you. You took care of so many of your family for years, but now your family will take care of you.

P21 - My sister will move in with me.

C21 - It's good to have family to be there for you.

P22 - Yes, it is. Now I've slowed down and let GOD take over.

C22 - How do you do that?

P23 - He has all the answers when I don't. [Pt smiles.]

C23 - Are you finding Peace in GOD, even in the middle of all this?

P24 - Yes. He gives me Peace. Let GOD take over. He has the answers.

C24 - I'm going to remember today as I go about my work, "Let GOD take over. He has the answers!"

P25 - We only see a little bit of the puzzle. He sees it all. [We talk more.]

C25 - [I like this lady's Faith. It's comfortable for me. I enjoy hearing her praise GOD. I become aware of a Nurse standing behind me at the doorway.] I see your Nurse needs to take care of some things for you. I wonder if you would like me to pray with you?

P26 - I would like to.

C26 - We will lift up these things together to GOD. [I read from PSALM 84. I pray about the many things this lady has shared with me. We end together saying The Our Father.]

P27 - [The pt has tears at the side of her eyes.] My eyes are burning a bit. The sunlight... Bob, are there tissues there?

C27 - [I open my eyes.] I see you need a dab at the side of your eyes. Let me wipe the edges of your eyes. [I gently dab the lady's eyes from the sides.] Are those tears?

P28 - Yes, I guess so. Maybe the Nurse can wash my face.

C28 - [Nurse comes in.] It's okay to cry if you need to, Diane. [Nurse affirms it's okay to cry. I sense an opportunity slipping away here. I've been here for a hour.]

P29 - Yes, I guess it is. Thank you, Chaplain Bob, for coming to see me!

C29 - [I get the feeling the patient doesn't want to talk about her tears now. Suddenly the praising of GOD is gone. She is cutting off the conversation. I think maybe I am too eager to oblige her.] You are very welcome. I would like to come back and invite you to share about your tears. Would that be okay?

P30 - That would be good if you could come to see me again, Chaplain Bob!

C30 - If I can't get back to you today, I'll see you again tomorrow. And I will remember what Mrs. Y said to me today, "Let GOD take over. He has the answers!" [I stand up after tapping her hand gently. We smile at each other. I leave my card at the bedside. I realize that I have become slightly tearful as well. I leave so thankful for this visit. Or am I leaving thankful because the visit is ending? Such Faith in a gentle soul facing tragedy.]

C31 - [Looking for Mrs. Y the next day, I find she has been discharged home on Hospice. I begin to second guess the seeming peace Mrs. Y talked about having, but realize it is a Gift of GOD, and leave it with Him. I say a prayer for Mrs. Y, her family, and for myself for GOD's Peace.]

### **Self-Awareness:**

I was aware of the patient's **faith** and **feelings**, spoken and unspoken, and how they overlapped with mine. I was eager to join with her in our common Faith, and affirmed her shared feelings, but became aware I was not always eager to explore with her other feelings: sadness; lingering grief; missing loved ones who have died; giving too much of self for others; angry at myself for poor self care; when the helper becomes helpless helped; sudden dependency; death will be here soon for us all; life can be not fair; being alone with GOD; needing to surrender to The LORD.

Maybe these deep issues and feelings were resolved and resolving for pt and for myself. Or maybe they were too superficially contained by a thin wall of calmness, acceptance and Faith. Maybe both and very human. I believe Mrs. Y was in fact struggling with spiritual turmoil, anger and doubt that needed to be given voice. PSALM 84 acknowledged her *Praise Talk*.

### PSALM 84:1-12 - Praise

<sup>1</sup> How amiable are Thy tabernacles, O LORD of Hosts!

<sup>2</sup> My soul longeth, yea, even fainteth for the courts of The LORD: my heart and my flesh crieth out for The living GOD.

<sup>3</sup> Yea, the sparrow hath found an house, and the swallow a nest for herself, where she may lay her young, even Thine altars, O LORD of Hosts, my King, and my GOD.

<sup>4</sup> Blessed are they that dwell in Thy House: they will be still praising Thee.

<sup>5</sup> Blessed is the man whose strength is in Thee; in whose heart are The Ways of them.

<sup>6</sup> Who passing through the valley of Baca make it a well; the rain also filleth the pools.

<sup>7</sup> They go from strength to strength, every one of them in Zion appeareth before GOD.

<sup>8</sup> O LORD GOD of Hosts, hear my prayer: give ear, O GOD of Jacob.

<sup>9</sup> Behold, O GOD our shield, and look upon the face of Thine anointed.

<sup>10</sup> For a day in Thy courts is better than a thousand. I had rather be a doorkeeper in The House of my GOD, than to dwell in the tents of wickedness.

<sup>11</sup> For The LORD GOD is a sun and shield: The LORD will give grace and glory: no good thing will he withhold from them that walk uprightly.

<sup>12</sup> O LORD of Hosts, blessed is the man that trusteth in Thee. <sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> KJV, PSALM 84:1-12.

But a better balance for Mrs. Y might have been PSALM 22, which alternates with the voice of first *Lament* and then of *Praise*, ending in certainty of deliverance by GOD in *Praise*, even when not spoken, even when avoided. I identified and connected deeply with both this patient's lament and praise, aware that I have alternated between deep times and experiences of both throughout my life:

PSALM 22:1-5 - Lament to Praise

<sup>1</sup> My GOD, my GOD, why hast Thou forsaken me? Why art Thou so far from helping me, and from the words of my roaring?

<sup>2</sup> O my GOD, I cry in the day time, but Thou hearest not; and in the night season, and am not silent.

<sup>3</sup> But Thou art holy, O Thou that inhabitest the praises of Israel.

<sup>4</sup> Our fathers trusted in Thee: they trusted, and Thou didst deliver them.

<sup>5</sup> They cried unto Thee, and were delivered: they trusted in Thee, and were not confounded. <sup>3</sup>

PSALM 22:6-11 - Lament to Praise

<sup>6</sup> But I am a worm, and no man; a reproach of men, and despised of the people.

<sup>7</sup> All they that see me laugh me to scorn: they shoot out the lip, they shake the head, saying,

<sup>8</sup> He trusted on The LORD that He would deliver him: let Him deliver him, seeing He delighted in him.

<sup>9</sup> But Thou art He that took me out of the womb: Thou didst make me hope when I was upon my mother's breasts.

<sup>10</sup> I was cast upon Thee from the womb: Thou art my GOD from my mother's belly.

<sup>11</sup> Be not far from me; for trouble is near; for there is none to help. <sup>4</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> KJV, PSALM 22:1-5.

<sup>4</sup> KJV, PSALM 22:6-11.

PSALM 22:12-24 - Lament to Praise

<sup>12</sup> Many bulls have compassed me: strong bulls of Bashan have beset me round.

<sup>13</sup> They gaped upon me with their mouths, as a ravening and a roaring lion.

<sup>14</sup> I am poured out like water, and all my bones are out of joint: my heart is like wax; it is melted in the midst of my bowels.

<sup>15</sup> My strength is dried up like a potsherd; and my tongue cleaveth to my jaws; and Thou hast brought me into the dust of death.

<sup>16</sup> For dogs have compassed me: the assembly of the wicked have inclosed me: they pierced my hands and my feet.

<sup>17</sup> I may tell all my bones: they look and stare upon me.

<sup>18</sup> They part my garments among them, and cast lots upon my vesture.

<sup>19</sup> But be not Thou far from me, O LORD: O my strength, haste Thee to help me.

<sup>20</sup> Deliver my soul from the sword; my darling from the power of the dog.

<sup>21</sup> Save me from the lion's mouth: for thou hast heard me from the horns of the unicorns.

<sup>22</sup> I will declare Thy Name unto my brethren: in the midst of the congregation will I praise Thee.

<sup>23</sup> Ye that fear The LORD, praise Him; all ye the seed of Jacob, glorify Him; and fear Him, all ye the seed of Israel.

<sup>24</sup> For He hath not despised nor abhorred the affliction of the afflicted; neither hath He hid His face from him; but when he cried unto Him, He heard. <sup>5</sup>

PSALM 22:25-31 - Deliverance and Praise

<sup>25</sup> My praise shall be of Thee in the great congregation: I will pay my vows before them that fear Him.

<sup>26</sup> The meek shall eat and be satisfied: they shall praise The LORD that seek Him: your heart shall live for ever.

<sup>27</sup> All the ends of the world shall remember and turn unto The LORD: and all the kindreds of the nations shall worship before Thee.

<sup>28</sup> For the kingdom is The LORD's: and He is the governor among the nations.

<sup>29</sup> All they that be fat upon earth shall eat and worship: all they that go down to the dust shall bow before Him: and none can keep alive his own soul.

<sup>30</sup> A seed shall serve Him; it shall be accounted to The Lord for a generation.

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<sup>5</sup> KJV, PSALM 22:12-24.

<sup>31</sup> They shall come, and shall declare His righteousness unto a people that shall be born, that He hath done this. <sup>6</sup>

### **Theological Reflection:**

I see these **Theological Symbols** in this case: a) the beauty of The Watchmaker's watch – we both enjoyed looking at GOD's creation; b) a life poured out as an Offering – she wore herself down caring for many others, but didn't do enough self care. That applies to me as well; c) tears in GOD's bottle – she was afraid to let her tears flow. I was reluctant to explore them with her or to cry with and for her;

d) Looking for GOD's Face – praising GOD when her heart needed to also lament to Him may in fact may have made it feel like His Presence was at times more distant. I wonder how my needs played into this; e) JESUS CHRIST on The Cross – Mrs. Y has died for others on a cross of sacrifice. She finds meaning of her life in that offering. So do I. But it's better to have The New Life of The Resurrection instead of always the pain of The Crucifixion. As Christians, we both understood that The Cross must come before The Rising Again.

I hear this **Theological Talk** in this case: The patient shares *Lament Talk & Confession Talk* with me – regrets that she didn't care for herself better; that she gave maybe too much of herself to others; that her work and poor self care may have contributed to her cancer; that so many of her loved ones have died; that she can not take care of herself in even simple things now; that she married too late to have children; that she needs to say to GOD, “All this just isn't fair!” but hadn't been able to say so yet.

I feel these **Theological Tensions** in this case: a) I have faith in You, O LORD. – I am angry at you, O LORD! b) I have cared for so many of my loved ones, GOD. – Why haven't You cared for me now? c) I trust You, O my GOD! – My GOD, My GOD, why have You abandoned me? d) I am crying inwardly in darkness, O CHRIST. – Let me cry outwardly in Your Light, O CHRIST!

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<sup>6</sup> KJV, PSALM 22:25-31.



### **Lessons in Ministry:**

I became aware of this **Theological Talk**: The patient's *Praise Talk* partly suppressed her tears and need to bring her sorrow before GOD openly. It was easier for me to join her in her *Praise Talk*, than to explore with her the occasional *Silence, Lamentation Talk* and *Confession Talk* more deeply. She will be able to better "let GOD take over" and find greater Peace in Him when she lets herself cry for all these things openly to GOD. It took an hour before she was able to give herself permission to cry a little over all these things. And further energy for this lady to admit that she was indeed crying.

I see these Images of my **Pastoral Care** in this case, some more successful than others: a) Listener – an empathetic, attentive listener of her Story; b) Companion – being with & accompanying this lady on her journey for a time; c) Witness – affirming her giving of self to loved ones and letting her know that someone has heard her; d) Pastor – guiding the patient to the green pastures of Scripture and prayer;

e) Bridge – a spiritual draw bridge let down to let her connect her inner feelings with her outward tears; f) Tear Collector – helping her receive permission to cry and own her own tears; g) Comforter – acknowledging her burdens and joining her in The Hope of our common Faith. Maybe if I had been more attentive to the meaning in the times of silence in this visit, I might have had a chance to help Mrs. Y explore these themes – the questions, laments, confessions and tears - earlier in our visit.

Since Mrs. Y apparently thinks Biblically, using Holy Scripture to explore and find meaning for her illness and life, offering a reading of PSALM 84 and/or PSALM 22 might have been an invitation for her to share more deeply. But how much should a Chaplain force the underlying questions before he becomes overbearing? A Minister must tread gently and circumspectly here, allowing people to share their **life Story** how and when they are ready, and in their own time and their own pace.

When I looked for Mrs. Y to visit her again, I found she had been discharged home on Hospice. Cherish the time with people in the present. Head towards the tears. Don't promise what we might not be able to deliver. Redeem the time as wise servants. We don't know when we might pass that way with them again!