

April 24, 2023

Waxahachie, Texas

Dear Praying Family and Friends,

Challenging News

After quite a hiatus in these updates, I bring this one containing unwelcome news. The lymphoma has returned. Oddly, it made its reappearance at the place where it first appeared - under my right armpit. It was even at the same locale and the same time of day - when I was lying in bed, listening to Barbara read the latest novel we were enjoying. And, my discovery of the lump happened the same way - scratching an itch below my armpit, and noticing a mass there which I did not expect to find.

Again, I alerted the clinic via email that night and was examined the following day by Dr. Awan, who immediately offered his opinion that the cancer has recurred. The only question was this - is it the cancer we drove into remission by the CAR-T therapy last year; or, is it an entirely different occasion of lymphoma? This latter possibility is not unusual. Only a biopsy would answer this question.

The biopsy was performed a week ago. I've received two different analyses in my patient portal. Both confirm that the mass under my arm is large B-cell lymphoma with a genetic profile "much as in previous analyses." So, it's a new, but identical lymphoma, or it's a recurrence of the previous lymphoma.

What now?

I am awaiting Dr. Awan's revelation of the options available to me at this point. They are likely very few, perhaps nonexistent. So far as I know, there are only two paths forward as far as therapy is concerned: (1) a stem cell transplant, or (2) entering a clinical trial for a therapy not yet approved by the FDA.

The stem cell transplant is questionable at this point because the clinic which administers this therapy has a cutoff age of 75. I had my 76th birthday last month.

Admission to a clinical trial is questionable because of the history of my previous therapy. Those who design clinical trials wish for the patients admitted to them to be "consistent" so far as their previous therapy is concerned. Additionally, they usually restrict how often a patient has had any therapy. Otherwise, the outcome of the clinical trial cannot confidently be linked to the therapy being tested.

So, I ask you to pray our Lord to open a therapeutic door for me. Once I know what that is - even if there are no more doors to open - I'll send you another update, likely fairly soon.

What to think about this turn of events?

This update is one of the most difficult I've written thus far, mostly because of my concerns for all of you who have so faithfully prayed for me over the past couple of years. I have been a Christian for 66 years. In that time, I have had quite a few occasions where I've stormed Heaven with prayers for this or that event, this or that brother or sister in the Lord, with a similar result - my petition was declined. When our Heavenly Father says "No," we must remember that He said "No" to His own Son in Gethsemane.

At this moment, of course, I do not know for sure that our Father's answer is "No." It may be "Not yet."

I am blessed to know a sister in the Lord who has been a great encouragement to me because she fought three different occasions of cancer, one after the other. At present she has been cancer free for many years. To her, our Father said "Not yet," and again "Not yet, and only at the third time did a "Yes" be granted.

Here, then, is another reason that the update you're reading poses a challenge to me - How do I communicate clearly that fighting this cancer is an enterprise that has changed its character dramatically over the past two and a half years?

On one hand, I've always had this goal - to defeat this cancer! It's a horrid, implacable, irresistible malice which very few people survive. Yes, I'm an old man already, and it's likely that my remaining days here are few, even if I survive this cancer. But, still - how fine a thing it would be to survive this particular cancer, one that has confounded physicians for generations.

On the other hand, a different goal emerged, one I've shared with you all before, namely my fight against this cancer has become a stage upon which my own sanctification has progressed in ways that amaze me, comfort me, and assure me of our Lord's favor and goodness toward me. Surely I wish this to continue!

But consider something - our Lord's path to His own glory never evaded sufferings. Instead, His journey among us went straight through sufferings of all kinds, temptations of all kinds, disciples who seemed never to "get it," implacable enemies who were never satisfied until they had killed Him with hideous torture. This is our Savior, Who while He was still journeying toward the cross said, "If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow me" (Matthew 16:24; Mark 8:34; 10:21; Luke 9:23).

For modern Christians this is a hard saying indeed. If my incessant cough is a cross to bear, I need to bear it patiently until it goes away. If this wretched cancer is a cross to bear, I need to bear it patiently as I follow our Lord through all the sufferings and indignities it brings me. Meanwhile our Lord uses all of it to shape a character in me that pleases Him before He calls me out of this world.

Please do not lose heart for my sake! As I've said before, I **cannot** lose no matter what happens, so long as I follow our Lord along whatever path He has chosen for me. Join me in asking for our Father's faithful grace toward me and toward all the rest of us as well.

Much love in Him,

Fr. Bill Mouser