

REFRAMING: SURGERY, LAUNDRY, AND LAY OFF

Behold, I make all things new.
Revelation 21:5

This Jesus is always stepping into our lives, declaring something new and unexpected. Sometimes we are delighted, sometimes dismayed, sometimes overwhelmed. No matter our initial response, Jesus fills it all with his presence. These God-surprises have taught me that, indeed, "All things work together for good for those who love God and are called according to his purposes." (Romans 8:28) God does not cause the hard things, but joins us in facing them. These new things, seen in the rear view mirror, often offer something good. Sometimes, it takes a while to recognize it.

Recently, three beloved people in my extended family all had surgery on the same day. My brother received a kidney transplant from his oldest daughter and our precious four-year old granddaughter had her sixth major hip surgery. The day before, I felt so deeply sad that these three beloveds all faced major surgery. In the midst of this sorrow, it occurred to me that fifty years ago, there would have been no surgeries ... and my niece would feel physically well, but be watching her father die of kidney failure, and our granddaughter would be crippled by pain and immobility. It reframed the surgeries, and my prayers were transformed into prayers of thanksgiving. (And all of them are recovering very well.)

Two decades ago, our six-year old next door neighbor was diagnosed with leukemia. At the end of his first week in the hospital, a close friend and I cleaned their house. I took their laundry home with me. It was such a paltry pile ... just a few changes of clothes for each parent, when they came home to shower. No kids' clothes, since the six-year old was in hospital gowns and the two-year old was living with friends. I took them to my laundry room, where I faced our haystack of dirty clothes, including a muddy pair of jeans for my nine-year old that looked as though he was still in them. I hugged the jeans and wept, so thankful for a family healthy enough to make dirty clothes. I've never viewed laundry in the same way again.

As with many of you who have faced your own life transitions in this economy, I was laid off from my dream job a year ago. My wonderful husband held up a mirror, reminding me that this had never been a job or a place I worked, but it was what God had called and equipped me to do and to be. So, the first day of 2010, I got up and continued doing this ministry in a new way. This year has been filled to the brim with opportunities to do the ministries with homes and congregations for which I have such passion. I have been joyously busy, working with wonderful people, some old friends and some new, doing work which brings me to my knees every day, giving thanks for this sign of God's abundance and presence in all of life.

At the beginning of this new year, look at your life through the lens of faith, wondering what God will be up to with you now. It is a wonderful opportunity. Blessings on your reframing.

FAMILY ACTIVITIES

1. As a family, name one daily or weekly chore. Wonder together about how this chore provides a reason to give God thanks.
2. Before we are ready to find reasons to celebrate the new, we need to grieve what we have lost or not been able to do or the hard things we have experienced. Invite each person in your family to share, "I felt really disappointed (or afraid or sad) when ..."
3. Looking in "the rear view mirror" of your life, share an experience in your past that was really hard. Talk to your kids about how it prepared you to be the strong person you are today and to reach out to others, wrestling with similar issues.
4. Ask your child to share an example from his or her own life that was hard and has grown strength and gifts in them. If they are stumped, offer an example you have seen.

5. As a family, talk about one new thing God is doing with each of you. Together, thank God.