

A New Season

Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

Over and over again in the past weeks, we have exclaimed and lamented that the coronavirus has shifted everything in our lives. We know we are in a new season, but we do not know exactly what that means. In much the same way, my life was thrust into a new season with the jolting news that I have Stage 1 Parkinson's Disease. I received this news for the first time on January 8, 2020, after a few months of health challenges that just were not adding up. My diagnosis was confirmed by a specialist at MUSC on March 3, and I was prepared to share this news with you in March when the COVID-19 crisis became full-blown.

In consultation with Bishop Lawrence and the Wardens, we agreed to delay the announcement while so much was unknown. Although our current situation still has many question marks, the initial shock of COVID-19 has past, and it remains uncertain when we shall re-gather. Again, in consultation with wise counsel, I have decided to invite you into the midst of this journey we are on as a family. We would appreciate your love and prayers as we walk into a new season with plenty of unknowns.

If you have limited experience with Parkinson's Disease (PD) as I did, you should know that Parkinson's is a neuron-condition which affects the brains dopamine-producing cells. This lack of dopamine causes a myriad of fairly unpredictable symptoms in the bodies of those afflicted. PD is a "snowflake disease" with no set pattern of symptoms and no known cause or cure. Statistically, I am slightly young to have PD with the average age of onset being 55. Because of the advances in treatment, PD does not generally shorten one's lifespan.

My prognosis in the near term (10 years+) is good. I have been on a medicine and exercise regimen since January that has produced some very good results. Thankfully my back is stronger, and my energy is better than at any time in the fall. As we look back over the months since my back surgery, it is easy to see how Parkinson's symptoms were masked by back pain and misdiagnosed as connected to my surgery. The most noticeable symptom is the slight tremor in my left hand.

With all of the unknowns, here's what I do know. This diagnosis does not define me or my calling. God has called me to lead at St. Helena's as your rector under the Vision He has given. We will together know when that time has ended, but I am certain we are just beginning. Practically, the Vestry annually evaluates my leadership, and I will work closely with them and the staff to deal with any new limitations. More importantly, I know that this disease is for God's glory. Those words came off of my lips to Tara on January 8 as soon as we were back in the car leaving the doctor's office. I believe this with all my heart. I also

know that "God owns Parkinson's Disease." He literally revealed those words to me in a powerful prayer time in the church after I was diagnosed. He is sovereign over PD, and He is able to heal it completely or to hold back the progression in medically unexplainable ways. Will you pray with me for miracles? Let's be bold together!

I know there are many responses to news like this. Trust me, we have experienced all of the emotions. Parkinson's forces you to live day by day much like the coronavirus. It's how we are all supposed to live, but we often spend our days planning or looking ahead and miss the moment. I am thankful for PD because it causes me to trust Jesus more and plan less. You may wonder what this means for our church or for my family. We do not know, but we do know Who holds the future. We have today and must trust the Lord for the future.

You may ask, "what can we do?" Three things are very helpful. First, please pray for us. By God's grace, we are doing well. Our families know and are supporting us in awesome ways. With this news going out, our situation will become more real. Please go to battle for us in the spiritual realms and pray for healing. Second, please ask me questions that are on your mind. Now is not the time to bottle up our emotions and fears. If I can answer the question, I will. I am still learning about PD, but I want you to know what I know. Finally, don't make us food. Many of you will find this surprising because I love to eat. It's not practical in this time nor is it necessary. There will be days ahead, hopefully many years ahead, where we will need practical help, but for now, your support and love are enough.

There have been many Scriptures that have been holding me and Tara up in the midst of this 2020 revelation – this new season – but perhaps the one that is speaking to me most is 2 Corinthians 12:9. I close with these words of the Lord recorded by St. Paul, "My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness."

With great hope,
Shay +