



## **“God Bond: Help in Trouble”**

First Sunday in Lent  
Saturday & Sunday, February 17–18, 2018  
All Services  
Serena Fedor  
Trinity Evangelical Lutheran Church  
Camp Hill, Pennsylvania

Genesis 9:8-17; Psalm 25:1-10;  
1 Peter 3:18-22; Mark 1:9-15

We all know trouble when we see it.

Flashing lights on the side of the road.

A phone call from a distant relative in the middle of the night.

And most of the time, we never see trouble coming. That's what makes it so hard to overcome once we're in it. Trouble strikes like a lightning bolt. It hits us in the most unexpected way and strikes us where we are most vulnerable.

That's how my trouble started on September 1, 2017. I was 41 weeks pregnant with our third son. I had gone into the hospital that morning to be induced because try as I may, nothing was making this baby come. The pregnancy had been a lot like my two previous pregnancies with Jackson and Parker. It was uneventful, full of morning sickness, swelling, cravings, and exhaustion. But after 14 hours of inducement, nothing would make the baby come.

Then like a bolt of lightning, the pregnancy went from routine to catastrophic. I remember my water breaking and I remember pain that was not like the other two pregnancies. Then my blood pressure dropped, and the baby's heartrate dropped, and the rest is a blur.

I have to rely on my husband Michael's account for what happened for the next 15 days, because I have no memory of it. And when he tried to tell me the whole story on September 16, the first day I was fully awake and aware of my surroundings, I had a hard time understanding what truly had happened to me and our baby.

Trouble. That's what happened. In its most powerful, urgent, and catastrophic form.

It's difficult to tell my story. Most of it is a third hand account told to me. The medical details of the episode my son and I experienced fill a three-ring binder. The personal stories from family and friends may someday fill a book.

The briefest explanation I can share with you that will make sense is my uterus had ruptured endangering the life of my son and me. He was being asphyxiated, and

although he was removed quickly, it was unclear if he would live. And if he did by chance live, they were unsure if he would be able to live a normal life.

As for me, I had lost **half** of my body's blood in minutes. The operating team rushed to transfuse enough blood to keep me alive to survive my *first* surgery, which lasted two hours. I did survive it, but upon being transferred to the intensive care unit, my heart and respiration stopped, and I had to be revived. After 4 mins, they got my heart beating again. That was 7:00 a.m. on Saturday, September 2.

Over the course of the next week, I would have three more surgeries and half a dozen procedures to try to stop the bleeding that was taking my life. I would experience liver failure, kidney failure, kidney dialysis, a condition known as "DIC," and hundreds of blood transfusions. Each of these conditions alone is life-threatening, but compounded one on top of the other made my odds of survival "slimmest of slim" by Monday, September 4. I would receive over 100 units of red blood cells and more than 200 units of blood products overall in order to survive.

Michael tells me on the worst day, he was told they were out of options. They had one last shot using a drug called Factor 7 to try to get me to stop bleeding internally, but if I did not respond, he would need to contemplate what it would mean to say good bye.

That is trouble, my friends. I faced it unconscious, critically ill, heavily medicated and monitored minute by minute by Dr. Safa Farzin and an incredible team of physicians and nurses at UPMC.

It was **two weeks** after this all started before Dr. Farzin finally spoke the words late one night to Michael and my family, "I think we can now say, Serena is going to make a full recovery."

I ended up spending a total of 3 weeks in the ICU and 2 weeks in rehab, then visited for 12 weeks by home health care. Our son, Luke, beat me home. He spent two weeks in the NICU, and after several tests and exams, they believed he may have escaped permanent damage, though we won't be able to say for certain for five years.

As I laid in room 1 in the ICU, I was never alone. Yes, one or more nurses was with me at all times, but that is not what I mean. I was not alone in the universe because God was there with me. And so were all of you. I felt it. It is why I fought so hard to live. I could feel your love pulling me to stay.

Love is the force that binds us together and binds us to God.

I felt the love of my husband, who never gave up hope, and found remarkable strength and courage to face every medical briefing with determination to get me home alive.

I felt the love of family and friends, who surrounded me and my family with support.

I felt the love of our pastors who from the first sign of trouble were there at Michael's call to be there to pray with him for me, to lay hands on me, and to urge me to not forget I was not alone. That God was with me.

And then there was the love of all of you. Your love given to our family in so many forms was felt by all of us.

Your love was with me in the form of prayer shawls that showed up when I was unconscious the Sunday after my first two surgeries. Kelly Falck and Amy Koch brought them to the hospital. One was made for each of my family members and provided a sense of comfort for my husband and sons. One was made for me and it spent every day I was in the hospital on me. Michael eventually gave me his prayer shawl while in the ICU, so I had two on me at all times. Dr. Farzin insisted they stay on me, and everyone will agree we saw improvements in my condition when they showed up.

My prayer shawl came home with me and has been on my bed ever since offering peace and comfort.

Your love was there as a meal train set up for our family. The simple act of making and sharing a meal with our family was so powerful. It lifted us and helped provide energy and sustenance for our children when Michael and I couldn't. Within 30 minutes of being posted online on September 3, the meal train was full, so a second month was opened up, which we ended up needing. This congregation became an extension of our family through the meals, cards, visits, acts of kindness, and prayer.

We can sometimes take prayer for granted. It can become an act we do at church, before a meal, before bed. It becomes routine, and its power becomes underestimated. I witnessed the power of prayer, and let me tell you it's as powerful as a lightning strike. I am standing here alive and speaking to you this morning with three boys alive and well because prayer has power.

So many people were praying for me, Luke and our family. In other states, in other countries. I don't even know all of the people who have prayed for us, but I still hear new stories from friends, acquaintances, and strangers telling me that they had people praying for us.

Nurses and doctors told me seeing the love and faith of our family motivated them to work longer, push harder through the exhaustion and fear, to not miss a test, not miss a round, to not miss an opportunity to provide the care that might finally turn the corner for me or for my son.

And it worked. Their devotion, their care, their commitment, their expertise, their faith was fueled by your love, your commitment, and your faith. All of it was guided by God's plan for us.

When you survive something like I did, when you beat what everyone says were impossible odds, you wonder if there is some big thing we are meant to do.

It takes the pressure off surviving to know that God is with us, that every life is precious to Him, and that even small acts of love in the lives of our friends and neighbors are as important as historic ones. Anything we can do to carry on God's covenant – his promise – to love us, to love one another as ourselves, and to remind others that God will never leave us is a vital and important service to God.

I wanted to share my story of crisis and survival with you because I think it teaches us we are a faithful community here at Trinity. My experience is affirmation that when people fulfill acts out of grace and abundance we are so much stronger as a community. When there is trouble, and it strikes with the speed and power of a lightning bolt, we have the power through many acts of love to end the torrential downpour of trouble and bring back the sun, and yes save a life. Two in fact.

Acts of grace big or small have a ripple effect. Don't be afraid to go visit that person in the hospital, they need it. Give blood often because it absolutely gives people a second chance at life. I'm living proof 200 times over. Make the meal for the family facing tragedy. Send a simple message, card or text to someone who needs comfort. You will help fill someone's heart that feels empty, and your heart will fill with love, too.

These acts meant the world to my boys. Michael. Our parents. Our entire family. Small acts of grace can have such a large impact when we carry out these works with love mindful they are part of God's plan. To say I am humbled by the grace you have shown my family is an understatement. I will say thank you every single day for the rest of my life. Thank you for being part of my family and reminding me that we are not alone.

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