

Everyday kindness 4A (1 Corinthians 1:18-31; Micah 6:1-8)

I'm giving thanks for the very personal ways I am blessed by people acting outside their job descriptions.

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On a bleak, late-winter morning I go in for a final ultrasound and lab work to confirm that my body has, in fact, rejected the drugs, and the fertility team will call off this month and start again next month or the one after.

Down the drain are weeks, no, months of medications, all in a rather selfish attempt to have a baby—but one that made me appreciate Hannah and Sarah and the other matriarchs who wanted babies.

This last round wasn't so bad; I was thirsty and so tired that I only drove known routes. The previous round of meds made me nauseous and fat. I shed head hair like a molting Afghan hound but grew prodigious body hair. I also had a very short fuse. My reactions were not commensurate with any given stimulus. One evening I burst into tears over the preparation of a plate of nachos.

The meds before that brought incredibly vivid, hallucinatory dreams. One night I dreamt that my spouse had become a turquoise-and-white-striped flying beach towel that could talk, a bit like SpongeBob SquarePants.

Feet in stirrups, stripped from the waist down, I stare at the darkened ceiling as the ultrasound technician enters. "Have we met before?" she asks. A curious aspect of

the volume at this practice is that the staff sees so many wealthy white women every single morning that we become entirely anonymous. I have been seeing the same staff members many times in any given week for over a year, and each time it's new and anonymous.

"Yes," I answer, "I think we've worked together before."

To the American greeting "How are you today?" I reply "OK."

"Just OK?" she asks.

"Today's labs are confirming that we're canceling the cycle."

"Oh, well, sometimes the body just needs to take a break. The body knows what it needs. It's just saying not right now."

Her humanity in this clinical setting brings tears to my eyes. In the darkened room she hands me a tissue, lowers the table, and tells me to sit up. As I do she pulls the sheet over my legs more generously, and I think of Noah's sons taking a cloak to lay over their black-out drunk father's nakedness out of respect. She is bossy in the most right way,

"Come in here," she says, and she pulls me in for a hug.

I compose myself a bit and say, "Thank you. You have blessed me." She just nods approvingly.

After probing around inside of me she brings the lights up and asks my age and which round of trying we're on. Then she says what I need to hear: "Listen, I've been doing this a long time, and all that this cancellation means is that they need to get the formula right. They're going to try again with another recipe. Nothing more than that. I've got your back."

There are other blessings too. I call about an insurance claim, and at the end of the conversation the insurance rep tells me that she had a baby with fertility treatment. "Hang in there," she ends the call, "I'm rooting for you."

An Uber driver—Wanda, herself a minister—engages me in conversation. I explain that I'm looking for a new job and that my husband and I are trying to have a baby. She corrects me, "You're having a baby. The questions to God are when and how,

but you need to lead with the confidence of the Lord.” As we approach my destination she breaks into spontaneous prayer asking God to show me the right job and baby. I suppose right is indeed what I want.

Each of these women blessed me with their words when I was in need. I think of Paul’s letter to the Corinthians—a mixed crew of humanity, not many of them “wise by human standards, not many were powerful, not many were of noble birth.” Some were, but most were not. Most were everyday saints living out the best of humanity in kindness and hope completely outside their official job descriptions.

There are good ways—perhaps preferable, more accurate, more authentic ways—to read these iconic texts from Matthew and Micah in all the political grandeur of their visions of justice and peace. But when one is living in the midst of the medical system, for a moment life becomes less political and more elemental. So this year, I’m reading 1 Corinthians more closely—and giving thanks for the very personal ways I am blessed by people acting outside their strict job descriptions, showering blessings from where they were at that moment in their lives.