

“Being Mortal: Medicine and What matters in the End” by Atul Gawande

WEEK 4:

Opening Prayer

Creator in heaven, we praise your name for all who have finished this life loving and trusting you, for those who have gone before us. We praise you for the journey of life and the grace that you offer us amidst our joys and challenges. We ask you to be with us this evening as we conclude our Lenten journey together. Be with us as we journey through Holy Week and to the joy of the resurrection. *Amen*

Questions for reflection and discussion

1. Gawande describes three modes of patient interaction by doctors:
 - The doctor knows best approach
 - The informative approach
 - The interpretive approach

Put your doctors in one of these categories. What challenges do you have when you chat with your doctor? What tools have you used to enable successful conversations with medical staff?

2. Gawande suggests that letting go requires changing one's perspective (stories of Jewel Douglass, Atul's dad), he refers to this as “stepping through the looking glass” with a serious illness diagnosis (p.194) This brings into question procedures that prolong life, such as nutrition/tube-feeding, ventilators, and CPR (cardio-pulmonary resuscitation).

Have you had that conversation with your spouse, parent, children?

What problems do you anticipate, or did you experience?

3. Gawande says that for the aged or terminally ill, there are two criteria:
 - confronting the reality of mortality
 - acting on the truth we find

How do we strike a balance between fear and hope, while still confronting reality.

4. What grounds you and supports you in being courageous in the face of difficult realities?
5. What support do you feel you need to face your mortality with courage and hope?
6. What can a faith community do to recognize, honor and support people for these choices?

Psalm 139

O Lord, you have searched me and known me. You know when I sit down and when I rise up; you discern my thoughts from far away. You search out my path and my lying down, and are acquainted with all my ways. Even before a word is on my tongue, O Lord, you know it completely. You hem me in, behind and before, and lay your hand upon me. Such knowledge is too wonderful for me; it is so high that I cannot attain it.

Where can I go from your spirit? Or where can I flee from your presence? If I ascend to heaven, you are there; if I make my bed in Sheol, you are there. If I take the wings of the morning and settle at the farthest limits of the sea, even there your hand shall lead me, and your right hand shall hold me fast. If I say, 'Surely the darkness shall cover me, and the light around me become night', even the darkness is not dark to you; the night is as bright as the day, for darkness is as light to you.

For it was you who formed my inward parts; you knit me together in my mother's womb. I praise you, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made. Wonderful are your works; that I know very well. My frame was not hidden from you when I was being made in secret, intricately woven in the depths of the earth. Your eyes beheld my unformed substance. In your book were written all the days that were formed for me, when none of them as yet existed. How weighty to me are your thoughts, O God! How vast is the sum of them! I try to count them—they are more than the sand; I come to the end—I am still with you.