

W3 | D7

NO MATTER HOW DARK

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I spent my 40th birthday in the hospital. This was not my plan.

A fever led to the doctor's office. The doctor's office led to a blood test. The blood test led to a phone call telling me to go to the emergency room; they were waiting for me.

That first day in the hospital was chaotic. The second day was full of testing and radiology. The third day, my birthday, I finally settled in. I spent most of that day waiting for my test results to come back so the doctors could determine how to treat me. I called my wife and asked her to bring the kids.

After I hung up, a cardiac surgeon—a man whom I had not met before but who would soon hold my heart in his hands—dropped by. He told me they had seen an issue on my echocardiogram and explained that I was in the early stages of heart failure and would need open-heart surgery.

This was the first time those words were spoken to me. “When?” I said.

He said, “In a few weeks, once we get your infection under control.”

Around the dinner hour, I found myself flipping through the channels. Alone. Struggling. Lost. *It was a fine birthday*, I told myself. *It's okay. You are going to be okay.*

Then came a knock on my door. An older African American woman poked her head in and said, “I have your dinner.”

As she set the tray down on the table beside me, she looked at the number on my ID bracelet and asked me for my name and date of birth. I recited both like I had a hundred times that week.

She nodded, started to leave, and then stopped. “Wait,” she said. “Today is your birthday?”

“It is,” I said.

She straightened herself up, turned to face me, and put her right hand over her left—a portrait of dignity and poise. And then, with just the two of us in the room, she began to sing over me:

Happy birthday to you.

Happy birthday to you.

Happy birthday, dear Mr. Ramsey.

Happy birthday to you.

I wept.

It was such a dark day. I felt like my life was in the balance, which it was. And with such a simple gesture, that kind woman was a light. She did not know me. She didn’t know whether I was kind or mean, gentle or abrasive, honest or a liar. She just knew that since I was there in her hospital on my birthday, I was probably feeling a little lost. I mattered to her.

Advent reminds us that no matter how dark we might sense the world to be, we are known and seen by the God who so wonderfully made us and knows our deepest need—met for us perfectly in the gift of his Son, the Lord Jesus Christ. ✨

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