

## Column

It did not seem right. I was the one who was supposed to be taking people to medical appointments and responding to emergency situations. After all, that is what a parish minister does. That is his calling.

Yet, last week the roles were reversed. I found myself having to have someone take me to the emergency room of a local hospital. What started out as something benign had escalated into a crisis. Arriving home around 4:30 p.m. that afternoon, I had lifted my computer bag straight up off the floorboard of my car. Apparently, in so doing, I pulled a muscle in the left side of my back.

I felt the pain immediately, but at first I was not too concerned. It would go away. Once in the house, it did not go away, but it rather got worse. I took a hot shower and some pain killers. Neither seem to make any difference. Determined to 'man it' out, with some effort, I got into bed. If I lay absolutely flat and straight, the pain subsided some but not

enough for me to go to sleep. Soon spasms began, and I could hardly get out of bed.

As there was no one home at the time, I called a friend who came over and helped me into the car and drove me to the emergency room. It was very humbling walking into the emergency room with my pajamas and bedroom slippers on, but that was the way it was.

Again, it seemed very strange for the roles to be reversed. I was supposed to be the strong one, the one who took care of others, but there I was sitting in the waiting room as I waited for the triage nurse to take me in.

Why was this happening? There must be a lesson here. The one I came to was that each of us needs to learn not only how to give care but to receive it . . . to be givers and takers.

Reflecting on this thought, I remembered a story a woman had told me over a quarter of a century ago. She and her husband had moved to North Georgia a year or so before I had. Soon her mother-

in-law, a stroke victim, was forced to move in with them, and she was called upon to be her caregiver.

Her mother-in-law, as she told the story, would cry out over and over, “Why am I still here?” She never knew quite how to respond until one day she found herself saying, “Mother, you spent your entire life taking care of others. Now, you need to learn to accept care from others.” She knew that it was the Holy Spirit who had given her this answer.

Jesus once told the apostle Peter, who throughout his life had been headstrong and self-sufficient, something similar: “Verily, verily, I say unto thee, When thou wast young, thou girdest thyself, and walkedst whither thou wouldest: but when thou shalt be old, thou shalt stretch forth thy hands, and another shall gird thee, and carry thee whither thou wouldest not” (John 21:18).

The lesson is simple but so often missed: each of us needs to learn both to be givers and receivers. Blessings come in both directions.

*ALMIGHTY and merciful God, of whose only gift it cometh that thy faithful people do unto thee true and laudable service; Grant, we beseech thee, that we may so faithfully serve thee in this life, that we fail not finally to attain thy heavenly promises; through the merits of Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.*  
(Collect, 13<sup>th</sup> Sunday after Trinity, the Book of Common Prayer)

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