

Dear Class Member,

Late last month, a woman on a flight to Hawaii, who didn't even know she was pregnant, went into labor. It happened that on the same flight were a doctor and three neonatal intensive care nurses, who all stepped forward and helped the woman and her premature child and cared for them both as the plane continued to its destination.

Some have called that woman "lucky," because of the medical personnel who also were among the passengers, but others might prefer the term "providential," which has theological implications, so that will be the topic of our next class.

The in-person and Zoom *Wired Word* continue to be for use in your homes, with your friends/family/co-workers or fellow Abide Group members.

The *Present Word* adult class and youth Sunday school classes resume in-person following our Sunday school COVID-19 Safety Guidelines: (http://www.sprucc.org/docs/Worship/ReOpenPlan_SundaySchool_201013.pdf) on Sundays at 9:00am on May 9, 16, & 23.

We continue to have 9:00am Tuesday morning Zoom Bible studies with Zion UCC: <http://www.sprucc.org/classes/adultstudy-groups.html#ZionUCCBibleStudy>.

Sunday evenings there is a six week series book discussion with Zion UCC of *The Post-Quarantine Church: Six Urgent Challenges & Opportunities That Will Determine the Future of Your Congregation* by Zoom from 6:30-7:30pm on April 18 & 25; May 2 & 9 (no class on May 16); and 6:30-8:00pm on May 23. Info at: <http://www.sprucc.org/news-a-events/recentaupcomingevents.html#PostQuarantine>.



Luck or Providence? Woman Gives Birth Unexpectedly on Flight Where Four Medical Professionals Are Passengers

The Wired Word for the Week of May 16, 2021

In the News

After Lavinia "Lavi" Mouna, who didn't even know she was pregnant, gave birth during an April 28 Delta Airlines flight from Salt Lake City to Hawaii, some called her "lucky" because there was a doctor and not one but three neonatal intensive care nurses on board to assist her, but we at *The Wired Word* are wondering if "lucky" is the right word.

The baby boy was premature, born at 29 weeks.

About halfway through the flight, family medicine physician Dale Glenn heard an emergency call, asking if there was a doctor on board, so he identified himself to a flight attendant and was taken to Mouna, who had given birth in the restroom. He also found with Mouna three nurses who had responded to the call for help. The three -- Lani Bamfield, Amanda Beeding and Mimi Ho -- were from North Kansas City Hospital NICU and were all specially trained to care for premature or ill babies needing intensive care.

For the remainder of the flight, Bamfield, Beeding and Ho, who were on board for a "girls' trip" to Hawaii, worked together with Dr. Glenn to take care of mom and stabilize the baby.

"I don't know how a patient gets so lucky as to have three neonatal intensive care nurses onboard the same flight when she is in emergency labor, but that was the situation we were in," said Dr. Glenn. "The great thing about this was the teamwork. Everybody jumped in together and everyone helped out.

"Basically, you need somebody to watch the mom too because we have two patients, not just one" Glenn explained. "So someone's got to help cut the cord, someone's got to help deliver the placenta, we've got to check vital signs on mom. Meanwhile we're trying to resuscitate baby, make sure baby's breathing, get baby warmed up. That's a lot of work to do, and we're all trying to work in a very small, confined space in an airplane, which is pretty challenging. But the teamwork was great."

Airplanes also aren't equipped to provide care for a premature baby, but Dr. Glenn relied on previous wilderness medicine training. He and the nurses used a couple of shoelaces to tie and cut through the umbilical cord, made baby warmers out of bottles that were microwaved, and used an Apple Watch to measure the baby's heart rate.

For three hours they kept the baby stabilized while over the Pacific Ocean without any of the usual equipment in a delivery room.

Glenn said the baby began to stabilize as they got closer to land. By the time they touched down, and the mother and child were being wheeled down the aisle, the baby, later named Raymond, finally began to cry.

Once the plane was on the ground, both mother and child were taken to Kapiolani Medical Center for Women & Children by an ambulance that met the flight.

Later, Dr. Glenn and the nurses had the opportunity to visit with mom and baby at the hospital for an emotional reunion.

"We all just teared up," said nurse Ho. Mouna "called us family and said we're all his aunties, and it was so great to see them." And Dr. Glenn is an uncle for life, Mouna said.

"It has been very overwhelming," said Mouna, "and I'm just so lucky that there were three NICU nurses and a doctor on the plane to help me, and help stabilize him and make sure he was okay for the duration of the flight."

There's that word again -- lucky. But an equally valid word is "providential." Which term you choose likely depends on how you perceive God's activity in the world.

Mouna has since been discharged from the hospital, but baby Raymond will remain in the NICU until he's ready to go home.

More on this story can be found at these links:

[Hawaii Pacific Health and North Kansas City Hospital Healthcare Workers Help Deliver Baby on Flight to Hawaii.](#) *Hawai'i Pacific Health*

['We All Just Teared Up': Kansas City Area Nurses Recount In-Flight Delivery En Route to Hawaii.](#) *The Kansas City Star*

[Nurses, Doctor Help 'Lucky' Mom Who Gave Birth on Flight.](#) *Local 12*

Applying the News Story

Luck and related terms and phrases, such as *fate*, *chance*, *fluke*, *fortunate*, *coincidence*, *things fell my way* and similar vocabulary are what we might call near-at-hand explanations for extraordinarily beneficial occurrences of life. If pressed for more interpretation, we may admit that God may have been working behind the scenes, but the near-at-hand words we use to account for such favorable occurrences seem to spring more easily to our mind and to our lips.

But the whole matter of who's in control of our world is an issue of faith, for we live our lives differently according to whether we see ourselves in the hands of God or the hands of fate or chance. Christianity does not claim that God always manages the minutiae of our lives -- although he numbers the hairs on our heads -- but that at root, our lives are in God's hands. And the word for that is *providence*, or as a name for God, Providence, with a capital "P."

Providence includes the ideas that God sees in advance what will happen and attends to such things. Thus, when we declare our faith in Providence over luck, fate, astrology and superstition, we are expressing our conviction that the agent behind the events in our lives is not the devil, not blind, uncaring fatalism, nor even something called "the odds." Rather we are declaring that we are in the hands of One who loves us, cares for us, guides us, provides for us and never lets us go. In that way, Christ really is the answer, for he points us to God.

The Big Questions

1. If the good things that happen to us can be attributed to Providence, does that mean that the recipients of the providential acts were especially worthy of them? If someone does not receive providential help, does that mean the person was not worthy of them? If the answer to both questions is "No," how do you account for the difference? Is it a misunderstanding of what providence is?
2. What does it mean that our lives are in God's hands?
3. If you have ever been in a situation of severe need and unexpected help showed up, what term did you use to describe the help?
4. Can something be both providential and lucky at the same time? Or is it always an either-or proposition? Is it clearer looking back over several years whether something was God's will or pure luck?
5. Is praying to win the lottery at odds with God's providence? Why or why not?

Confronting the News With Scripture and Hope

Here are some Bible verses to guide your discussion:

1 Kings 17:3-4

Go from here and turn eastward, and hide yourself by the Wadi Cherith, which is east of the Jordan. You shall drink from the wadi, and I have commanded the ravens to feed you there. (For context, read 17:1-16.)

These verses are from a larger story where a long-lasting drought hit Israel, leading to famine and other problems. The Lord intends the prophet Elijah to be his messenger to King Ahab, but in the meantime, he *provides* (from the same root word as "providence") for Elijah's needs as described in the verses above. Later, when the wadi dried up, the Lord sent Elijah to the widow of Zarephath who fed him from her meager supplies, which the Lord kept from running out.

Questions: Was Elijah lucky during the drought? Was it just a case of his "number not being up"? Why or why not? Whether or not Elijah was blessed or lucky during the drought, how do you think he looked at it? How would you have looked at it if you'd been in his sandals?

Proverbs 16:33

The lot is cast into the lap, but the decision is the LORD's alone. (No context needed.)

The "casting of the lots" is mentioned 70 times in the Old Testament and seven times in the New Testament, and was a means of making a selection between two or more individuals or options by means that would be normally considered random, something like what we mean today by "rolling the dice," "drawing straws" or "flipping a coin." But neither Testament explains what materials were used for lots or exactly how casting them was done. The lots may have been small stones or sticks of various lengths. According to the verse above, whatever items were used, they may sometimes simply have been thrown into one's lap.

But the point of the proverb above is that however random the casting of the lots may have seemed, the result from the procedure was understood as being God's will, an expression of his providential care of us. A notable example of this is found in Acts 1:15-26 where Jesus' disciples picked Matthias by lots to replace the now deceased Judas in the Twelve. There, the casting of lots was preceded by prayer, asking for God's help.

Questions: Is God's will helped or hindered by a game of chance like casting lots? Does it make any difference at all? Does God ever make his help known through random methodology? Was it God's will that the doctor and the three nurses be on that flight, or was it just a coincidence or random chance? Defend your answer.

Matthew 6:28-30

And why do you worry about clothing? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow; they neither toil nor spin, yet I tell you, even Solomon in all his glory was not clothed like one of these. But if God so clothes the grass of the field, which is alive today and tomorrow is thrown into the oven, will he not much more clothe you -- you of little faith? (For context, read 6:25-34.)

This verse and its context are all about God's providence. Providence comes from the same root word as does "provide" and "provisions." It means that in an ultimate sense, nothing happens that cannot be subject to God's purposes. That does not mean that God plans everything that happens to us, but it does mean that this is God's world, and he, not luck, fate, chance, superstition, astrology or any other so-called force, determines the meaning of this life of ours.

And it also means that no matter how terrible are the things that may happen to us, none of them can separate us from the love of God. Providence means that there is a creating, saving possibility in every situation that cannot be destroyed by evil or by anything else.

Life philosophies that rely on luck, fate, superstition or astrology imply that good comes -- but only to a "lucky," "chosen" or "random" few. Providence testifies that God's goodness is for all.

Unlike such notions as fate or luck, Providence is understood as a positive and intentional working of goodness in life. A movie released in 1963, used a phrase from this biblical passage as its title: *Lilies of the Field*. It's a friendly story of an unemployed construction worker, played by Sidney Poitier, driving out West. When his car overheats, he stops at a remote farm in the desert to get water. The place is occupied by a small group of East European Catholic nuns who are trying to establish a place of ministry there. They have been praying for a chapel, and this man ends up being the answer to their prayer, for before moving on, he builds the chapel for them. By titling the movie from this Bible passage, we understand that the writers intended this story to be understood as being about Providence.

Questions: What does God's care for the lilies of the field teach you? If we believe God is looking after flowers and birds, what does this say for your flowers caught in a late frost, or birds with the misfortune to be hatched during a killing cold snap?

Why pray when you can worry? Where are you aware of Providence operating in your life? Have you had anything happen in your life or that of a loved one that had to be either a remarkable coincidence or an action of God? What helped you decide which it was, or at least the likelihood that it was one or the other?

Matthew 8:13

And to the centurion Jesus said, "Go; let it be done for you according to your faith." And the servant was healed in that hour. (For context, read 8:5-13.)

Here a Roman officer asks Jesus to heal his servant who lies paralyzed and in great distress back at the officer's house. Jesus agrees to go see the sick man, but the officer says, "I am not worthy to have you come under my roof." He then expresses his confidence that Jesus can heal the sick man from afar.

Jesus is surprised at this soldier's faith and says so. He then tells the man that when he gets back home, he will find his servant healed, "according to," Jesus says, the officer's faith. In other words, Jesus is telling him to remember that the healing of the servant is a direct result of faith. There is no coincidence involved.

Questions: What role does your faith play in your ability to sort providence from coincidence? From luck? From chance? What does the fact that you feel unworthy of providential consideration have on your interpretation of events?

For Further Discussion

1. Have you ever been an instrument of Providence, meaning you were in the right place at the right time to be the answer to another's need? If so, what was the impact, if any, on your own faith?

2. Comment on this: In Santa Fe, New Mexico, there's an old building called Loretto Chapel that had been part of a convent and girls' school run by the Loretine Sisters. The chapel was completed in 1878 and included a balcony in the rear, 22 feet above the main floor, but the builders had planned only a ladder to reach it -- fine in a boys' school, but not the thing in a school for girls, the nuns felt. But there was neither room nor money for a conventional staircase. So the sisters prayed, and eventually, a gray-haired man with a toolbox showed up looking for work. He built a beautiful space-saving spiral staircase to the loft. It has two 360-degree turns and has no visible means of support. It was constructed without nails -- only wooden pegs. It took six months to build, and once completed, the man dropped out of sight without asking for pay or even thanks. Today, not even his name is known. You can call that man's showing up a coincidence, but the nuns called it providence, something they came to rely on because they believed that God is in control of the world.

3. React to this, from TWW team member Frank Ramirez. "The preemie story really resonates with me. Recently we celebrated my oldest son's 42nd birthday. When my wife went into labor at 27 weeks, we knew she was pregnant, but we didn't know that the discomfort she felt in the small of her back was labor. At that point, May 4 of 1979, I was a month away from graduation from seminary in the Chicago area, after which I would take up my first pastoral assignment in Los Angeles. Jennie was barely showing, but when she began spotting we went to our doctor, who sent her to DuPage Community Hospital in the nearby suburbs.

"At that point she began bleeding profusely, to the degree where we feared for her life. We were told our son would not survive, but they decided to send Jennie to Foster G. McGaw Hospital associated with the University of Chicago. An ambulance had just pulled in that had to return to Chicago, and on the hair-raising ride, we made it to the hospital through Friday afternoon Chicago rush-hour traffic, something of a miracle itself.

"Unbeknownst to us, the hospital had a brand-new neonatal unit. Jennie was rushed into surgery without signing any forms. They basically had her open from chest to navel, leaving a scar nearly a foot long. The doctor came out at last to tell me she was alive, for which I thanked God. One of the women sitting with me asked the doctor, 'What about the baby?'

"He was in that neonatal unit, and after several crises over the next two months, including six full blood exchanges, he went home. Having the ambulance, being sent to a hospital with a brand-new neonatal unit certainly felt like a miracle, but we also include the fact that unbeknownst to us, Jennie's employer at the local park district had changed insurance from a tepid policy to one providing very strong coverage only the month before.

"We tend to lean toward God's providence when it comes to this story, but if not, we were pretty lucky. Francisco is healthy and happy, and an even bigger Bob Dylan fan than I am."

Responding to the News

As more people are vaccinated and the pandemic begins to ease, this would be a good time to thank health-care workers who, providentially, have been God's healing hands and comforting heart in the midst of this crisis.

If you can locate the movie *Lilies of the Field*, we heartily recommend you watch it.

Prayer

O God, thank you for your abiding presence with us and for your daily care for us. May your name be praised! Amen.