

**Ashley:**

Good morning! If we haven't met yet, my name is Ashley Enns. I've been around Southridge since my family moved to the Niagara Region back in 2000. If you or someone you know around here is in Grade 6 through Grade 12, you might recognize me—I'm the lucky one who gets to hang out with our Jr. and Sr. Youth students on Thursday nights as the Youth Pastor.

**Aaron:**

And I'm Aaron Enns. I've been around here for the last 12 years—ever since Ash and I got married. I may look familiar to some of you as I'm up here whenever the position of mediocre acoustic and average vocals is scheduled.

We have three wild and beautiful and on occasion, challenging kids—Levi, Jace, and Sierra. You've probably seen them around, and might recognize them as they often climb on the handrails or run to the front after communion to get the leftovers.

**Ashley:**

We've been invited to share a part of our story.

To catch you up, I've been battling breast cancer for almost a year. It started back in June of 2023 when I found a lump and was immediately worried. I went in for an ultrasound, and at the time they said it simply looked like a cyst. Nothing urgent—they'd just keep an eye on it with ultrasounds every 6 months.

And at the same time, I had just accepted the role of Youth Pastor here at Southridge.

It wasn't a position I had been actively chasing. In fact, it kind of surprised me when it first came up. But as I prayed and wrestled with it, I had this deep sense that God was leading me into it.

I was so excited to step into this new role. I felt ready and more than a little nervous. I had a vision for what youth ministry could be, I already knew how amazing our students and youth leaders are, and I genuinely felt like God had positioned me for this moment.

So when the news came that they wanted to do a biopsy, those two parts of my life collided in a really jarring way.

On August 15th, I was called into a room for my biopsy. It was the first time I found out they were checking three different spots, not just the lump I had originally felt. I knew in that moment: this most likely wasn't going to be nothing. I started to spiral. I couldn't stop panicking. I felt vulnerable and scared and alone. I could not shake the surging feeling that **it's not supposed to be this way.**

And then—the nurse, whose name I don't even remember, grabbed and held my hand. She looked me in the eyes and gently said,

**"We're going to do this one step at a time. One day at a time."**

It didn't fix anything. But it changed something.

I was still scared. But I wasn't alone anymore.

That simple act of kindness reminded me: I was being held.

Not just by her, but by God.

It's amazing how one small gesture, someone holding your hand, can break through fear. In that moment, I didn't just feel seen by a nurse; I felt seen by God.

Like David poetically reminds us in Psalm 139: 7 - 10:

<sup>7</sup> Where can I go from your Spirit? Where can I flee from your presence?<sup>8</sup> If I go up to the heavens, you are there; if I make my bed in the depths, you are there.<sup>9</sup> If I rise on the wings of the dawn, if I settle on the far side of the sea,<sup>10</sup> **even there your hand will guide me, your right hand will hold me fast.**

**Aaron:**

Thinking back to the morning of the biopsy, transparently, I remember distracting myself with work emails on my phone while I sat in the waiting room as Ash had the procedure. I didn't know there were three spots (though at a point Ash had learned it) and was still very hopeful that this was just part of the "routine" check ins. I am not a jump to conclusions kind of person. I rationalize very many things until they're proven to be not so good and am generally pretty good at keeping a positive outlook. I recall the weeks leading up to the biopsy being more of a time to be sure I was helping Ash manage her anxiety while not allowing myself to believe this was

more than a cyst; Ash was only 33 after all. The idea of cancer at that age was simply nonsense.

I remember when the nurse for the biopsy came out to get me in the waiting room. She came out and said, "Ashley has been so brave and so tough, but I think she needs you right now."

My heart sank. That moment was probably the lowest of my life so far. Immediately my head rushed into the frenzy of fear. What does this mean? How could something like this happen to someone so young? How in a period of Ash's life when things were seemingly starting to align could something so imperfect jump in and steal what felt like a stride led by Jesus?

A lot changed in that moment and my heart screamed, **"it's not supposed to be this way."**

I followed the nurse to the room joining my visibly heartbroken wife. I remember wiping her tears as they finished the biopsy and as that sweet nurse continued to share her love and kindness.

#### **Ashley:**

From that room, we drove straight home and wept. Who am I kidding, I was crying long before we left the hospital but continued at home. Questions were ping-ponging around in our heads. If it was cancer what stage was I at, how would we tell our kids, what would this mean for my job and the students adjusting to change once again, would I lose all my hair, would I recover from this or was it giving me a timeline? All the unknowns that come with a cancer battle.

We prayed for a miracle, that these somehow were still cysts. I could envision the relief it would be to hear that it wasn't cancer! What a new lease on life we would have!

The next week we heard our doctor say the words we feared "Unfortunately, it is cancer."

We held each other's hands. We cried some more. We had a thousand more questions, for the drs and for God.

After a month filled with doctor appointments— scans, tests, consults—all trying to establish a plan of action, it was finally my turn to start chemotherapy. I remember sitting in the chair for the first time, surrounded by the quiet hum of machines and other patients at different stages in their own battles. Everything felt surreal.

I watched as the bright red chemo dripped into my veins for the first time. It felt like something out of a movie, only it wasn't. This was my body. My life. My story.

And as I sat there, trying to take it all in, I thought again: **"It's not supposed to be this way."**

Not at 33. Not when my kids were still so little. Not when I had just started a new job I felt called to. Not when I was trying to step into life with boldness and joy.

This wasn't part of the plan, *our* plan.

And honestly, I don't think it was *God's* original plan either.

That day in the chemo chair, I was full of fear. I didn't feel strong or brave or even particularly faithful.

But what I *did* feel, eventually, was held.

Held by God's presence, even if it was quiet. Even if it didn't answer all my questions.

**"Even there your hand will guide me, your right hand will hold me fast."**

And that "even there" is what gave me just enough courage to cling to Jesus.

**Aaron:**

Journeying through those initial rounds of chemo from September to January was tough and in part only the start, though we weren't terribly aware of that at the time. Then came the first of several surgeries, the start and completion of radiation and started maintenance chemotherapy which will bring us to the end of 2025. Now we're navigating how she'll be treated for the next five years. It really has been so much, and the end isn't yet in sight.

**Ashley:**

Throughout this journey, I've found myself constantly trying to prepare for the next seventeen steps, hoping that if I anticipate everything, nothing will catch me off guard. Yet every time something changes and I am overwhelmed all over again. After wrestling through the emotional weight of each change, I'm gently brought back to the present, back to the reality that all I truly have is today, and that God is holding me through it. He's been right beside me in every moment. I believe God grieves with me, grieves this diagnosis, all that it has brought, and mourns that the world is not as it was meant to be. Even there - in my questions, and wrestling and sorrow - God's hand will guide me, His right hand will hold me fast.

**Aaron:**

For me, this has been the most challenging year of my life; practically and spiritually. One of the toughest parts for me has been the total loss of control. I love to know what's coming and to work as hard as necessary to change it if it doesn't look good.

Not an option in this though. I can't fix this for Ash. I can't take away her pain. I can't make the treatments easier, or the fear go away. But what sometimes feels worse than that loss of control is that I believe in someone - Jesus - who I really do think has the power to change it all. Here lies my greatest spiritual challenge so far of this journey. How - or why - does our all knowing, all powerful, perfectly loving God hold our hands, but not change our circumstances? How come I cry and pray and cry and pray and yet each day after the next seems unchanged?

I definitely don't have the answer to these. All I have is a strong feeling that **it's not supposed to be this way**. And still in this confusion, amidst my doubts and even during my frustrated times cry-yelling work van prayers I'm reminded that, **"Even there your hand will guide me, your right hand will hold me fast."** I'm not left alone feeling like it's not supposed to be this way.

**Ashley:**

Many of us know that feeling—the deep ache that whispers, “It’s not supposed to be this way.” You don’t need a cancer diagnosis to understand that kind of pain. It’s all around us. Internationally, we witness terrifying wars, injustice, and displacement. Within our own country, we grapple with the painful legacy and ongoing mistreatment of our Indigenous neighbours, as well as deep political division often accompanied by anger and hatred. In our local communities, we feel the weight of a rising cost of living and increasing loneliness. Within our families, there are strained relationships, fertility struggles, and the heartbreaking loss of loved ones far too soon. And within ourselves, we face the silent battles—addiction, mental health challenges, and insecurity.

I don’t know about you but to me, hearing that list and knowing this is just scratching the surface of pain in the world, feels very overwhelming. It feels too big.

**Aaron:**

Sadly—this isn’t something new.

As I've thought back on our journey this last year, I've been drawn to a few stories from the Bible of encounters with Jesus. In Jesus' story, we see people who also felt like life wasn't supposed to be this way:

A heartbroken woman at a well, yearning to be purely seen.

A furious disciple, Peter, slicing at a servant's ear in defense of his beloved friend.

Two sisters struck with grief at the death of their brother, who passed far too soon.

A sick woman desperately reaching for healing.

And then Jesus Himself—facing betrayal, pain, and death on a cross.

That moment—the cross—is the great redemption cry of Jesus, reaching around all of us, holding us in a perfect embrace to say, “I didn’t design it to be this way, and I’d do anything to make it right again.”

This idea of being held has been our recurring theme through the journey. We can’t fix the pain. Can’t solve mental health, or end wars, or cure cancer. But we can **hold people through their pain and heartbreak**—in the same way Jesus has held others.

Like when he broke the social, religious and cultural norms to speak with the heartbroken woman at the well, showing her that she is known.

Or when he bridged the gap between Peter and the servant, healing both of them in different ways; crossing boundaries to do it.

When Jesus joined Mary and Martha in their weeping, he was empathetically holding them with his tears to say, ‘it’s not supposed to be this way.’

When Jesus’ clothing was touched by the sick woman, she wasn’t scolded, but welcomed and even celebrated for her faith by Jesus as he turned to see her chasing after him.

As I wrote this last one and made the connection I couldn’t help but to feel the most parallel to this small story. Some days it feels like I’m reaching with everything that I have left and the garment of Jesus is just out of reach. My hope is that one day again Jesus will turn his face to see me and celebrate that even in this all consuming walk we’re on and celebrate that my faith carried me through without relenting in that chase.

**Ashley:**

We think a big reason why we're able to continue that pursuit of Jesus through all of this is because we've been held so lovingly by so many.

By friends, family and even strangers, who showed up with meals, with texts, voice notes, shared song, babysitting, and most often offering prayers.

We've been held by a group of friends who have listened when we had only worries to offer them. Always responding with understanding and encouragement.

We've been reminded again and again: **we are not alone; in our brokenness we are held.**

**Ashley:**

And that's what we want to remind you of today.

If you're here this morning and you feel like life is not the way it's supposed to be.

If you're sitting in your own uncertainty, disappointment, or grief.

If you feel like you're drowning in questions that don't have answers.

We want to look you in the eye and say:

**You're not alone.**

We're going to do this—**one step at a time. One day at a time.**

Let's be the kind of people who show up for each other in the hard stuff.

Let's be the ones who grab a hand, who sit in the silence, who say,

**"I can't fix this, but I'm not going anywhere."**

Because the truth is—we can't always take away each other's pain.

We can't always change the diagnosis, or mend the heartbreak, or undo the loss.

But we *can* carry it together.

We *can* refuse to let anyone walk through it alone.

Let's be a community that reminds each other that even in the darkest places, even in the "it's not supposed to be this way" moments—we are still held.

Held by a God who hasn't let go.

Held by a God who grieves with us, sits with us, and walks beside us.

Held by a love deeper and more faithful than we can imagine.

**We are held.**

*“Where can I go from your Spirit? Where can I flee from your presence?...Even there your hand will guide me, your right hand will hold me fast.”*

Even there.

Even now.

Even in this.

**Aaron:**

Let's pray.