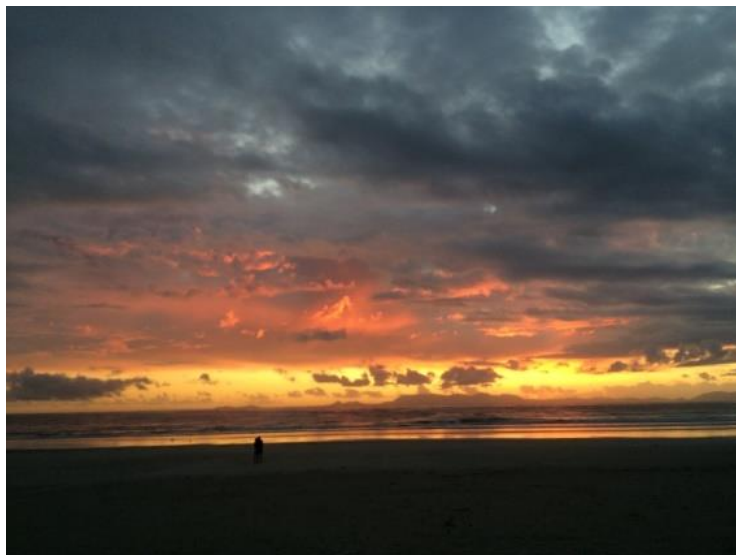


Surrounded by Angels

As I sit and write this blog, we have just celebrated mother's day in the UK and today is International Women's day, which has made me reflect on the amazing women who have had a massive impact on my life and my faith journey. These women in my life have been encouraging, supportive, honest, vulnerable, inspiring and have taught me many things along my journey and it is a privilege to be able to walk alongside and learn from them. All of them are incredible women of God and have and continue to make differences not just in my life but many others too. I have also many male influences in my life who have been just as influential and I don't want to ignore them but I want to write this blog to acknowledge women specifically as there is something special women supporting each other, particularly on the journey I have been on.

I am currently still in South Africa, in my last blog you may remember me speaking about suffering from a trapped nerve in my back and postponing my trip to Uganda until the middle of February. Shortly after posting my blog, I was still suffering from symptoms and had a very bloated and sore stomach and still experiencing a lot of pain in my left side down to my groin, after not being able to get any help from the pharmacy I went to the doctors and a large 15cm cyst was discovered and it was thought to be attached to my left ovary, which could not be seen on the Ultra Sound. It was decided that they needed to get rid of the cyst ASAP as there is a possibility it could burst and it was causing me a lot of pain. They wanted to preform key hole surgery to see what was going on with the ovary and drain the cyst. This would mean going into hospital to have an operation.

Stunning sunsets, being able to spend time in God's creation



There is no NHS in South Africa, you either pay privately or go to the government hospitals. Although all the medical staff here in South Africa are brilliant in both private and government hospitals, the government hospitals are under resourced and have too many patients which can have a major impact on the type of care given. I have taken and stayed with

children at government hospitals, it has broken my heart to leave them there, like I say nothing to do with the professionalism or care of the staff but due to the poor resources. I was able to go into a private hospital and although we were unsure if the insurance would pay out, I decided that I would trust the Lord for the money and I had offers from people to lend me the money and parents willing to help. However this really challenged me to think about people who do not have this choice, who

cannot afford private health care and have to go to government hospitals even if it means not being able to get the right treatment due to cost. It feels very unfair that this happens and it's just because I was born in a different place, into privilege if you will. I know this happens all over the world but I think it is good to be reminded of this and not to become complacent, I want the Lord to keep my heart soft and passionate about these issues and show me what I can do to help the fight against injustice.

I went into hospital on 2nd February to have the keyhole surgery, however the cyst turned out to be a tumor and my left ovary had been damaged due to the tumor twisting and turning the ovary, so they had to perform a larger operation, oophorectomy. I was very scared going into theater but knew I had to put on my big girl pants and that I was not alone, I truly felt all your prayers surround me like angels. I also had amazing friends who stayed with me in the hospital.

They performed tests on the tumor and luckily it was benign. The operation was a success but due to the operation being bigger than expected I had to spend a couple of nights in hospital, attached to drips and a catheter. I had a reaction to the anesthetic which made me quite sick after the operation, I have never had major surgery before, so it was a bit of a shock not being able to get up and go to the toilet and to have to be washed in bed by other people and made me truly thankful for my health and ability to be able to do things for myself which again so many people are not able to do.

Spending time with friends



The Lord was amazing and provided me with people to be with me in the hospital and look after me during the recovery, people who have given me places to stay, extra money to support my extended stay and even the money to cover the operation if the insurance will not pay. Even the timing of things have been incredible, due to the operation and the doctor's advice I decided to put my trip to

Uganda back until the end of March. This worked well as there had been elections in Uganda and there had been some violence, also someone who is moving on from Uganda is moving out of her apartment and selling her car, towards the end of March and I am going to be able to share both these things with another girl, which helps a lot financially and socially for me.

I have been recovering well, my scar is healing and although there is still some soreness and tenderness, I feel more like myself than I have done since December,

which is great. During my recovery I have spent some quality time with my friends here as well as with the Lord. I have been able to properly rest, read and just prepare myself for the next adventure. I have also had time to start to come to terms with losing my ovary, which seems a bit silly. However I have been desperate to have children since I was a child, so it was a concern but I was assured that you can still get pregnant, it just lessens the chances. This did bother me a little as I am getting older and still not married, so my chances of being to have children naturally are lowered already. However reading the bible and reading about women such as Sarah, Rabekah and Rachel who were all barren and had children later in life, God can work miracles, if it is his will. If not I give this to the Lord and trust it to him, he may want me to be a mother in other ways. I was reminded of this recently when I went to visit one of our children who is now with a foster family. Her foster mother said to me that when she speaks about her mum, she means me. This broke my heart but reminded me that you don't need to be a biological mother to provide someone with the love and care of mother. I hope I can continue to do this in Uganda.

I am so privileged that I have not had to do this journey alone, God has been there each step of the way and placed key people (particularly women) both near and far to help and support me and talk me through it and I am thankful. I am now ready to continue my journey to Uganda, I have booked my flight for 29th March, I am excited about this new adventure and I pray that God can use me in the lives of other women and girls I meet. Thank you so much for all your prayers, love and support it has meant the world to me.

Em xx