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# Inside the Speedway: A Reflection on Community, Hope, Fear, Peace & Gratitude

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Good morning. I work for Atrium Health. This weekend, Atrium is holding a COVID mass vaccination clinic at Charlotte Motor Speedway. I signed up to help on Friday. My leadership was involved in planning and it seemed important to support their heroic efforts in organizing this massive event.

I showed up bright and early to get to work at my station. Perhaps I really didn't think through what this day may truly be about. You see, the coveted vaccine, was the point of the whole event, but it was much more than that.

It was about Community.

This was an uplifting day for so many. There was an excitement by all the teammates and physicians and leaders that showed up that day to perform their assigned task. It was health care workers gathering together for a big event where they can connect with individuals in the community who longed for this vaccine. It was folks in the community coming for a lap around the Speedway and interacting with healthcare workers to get that important vaccine. Big events haven't been a thing since last March, so this felt really good for the soul to gather together. I could see it in their eyes and hear it in their voices. It sure did feel good to be in community together again...

It was about Hope.

For the Critical Care physician leader providing vaccines to people, it was an important day. He has been tirelessly managing the ICU beds at 9 hospitals – it was important for him to be there to see these faces – these faces that he hopes he'll never see in the ICU beds that he is managing.

For the people in the community who showed up early and excited about this vaccine, it was a day of hope. I could see the hope in their eyes and hear it in their voices. I had one person tell me excitedly that she felt like she had won the lottery!! Getting a vaccine seemed like a celebration for so many. Not just her but so many folks were hopeful that by getting this vaccine that they could soon see their families again, hopeful that they could get back to life and hopeful that COVID wouldn't interfere with the life plans they had made. Elevating hope that day was critical to the wellbeing of so many....

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It was about Fear.

Folks have been fearful of getting COVID, fearful of being one of those statistics we hear on the news, fearful of the vaccine and fear of having side effects. As some cars pulled up to the vaccine station, I could see the fear in their eyes and their nervous hands that rattled the papers. Maybe it was those folks that captured my attention so vividly and I realized my role was more than the task I was assigned. I needed to be present with those individuals, slow things down a bit, offer a warm welcome, and maybe provide some assurance to them that everything was going to be ok. My prayer is that recognizing those fears and providing calm and reassurance may have made a difference...

It was about Peace.

One gentleman specifically worried us a bit. He was the driver and had to get out of his car so we could give the vaccine in his right arm. He was sitting in chair like other folks had done that day, he received his vaccine and he just sat there for a bit after receiving it. We waited for him to get up, but he just sat there. We were concerned that maybe he wasn't feeling well and stayed by his side and asked if he was ok. He was just fine – Folks, I think he was at peace – that peace that passes all understanding. I wish I would have paused just a few more moments with this gentleman and enjoyed that peace alongside him....

It was about Gratitude.

There was gratitude among all the healthcare workers who were strangers before that day and left at the end of their shift with new friendships.

In this time of COVID, we have felt so many different feelings and maybe gratitude wasn't at the top of the list. On Friday though, I saw so much gratitude. Repeated messages from folks in the community expressing their deep gratitude to the healthcare workers and gratitude for the opportunity to receive a vaccine. Soaking in the goodness of the day was good for the soul ....

You see, I was assigned a task that day to help with vaccines for our community. However, reflecting back on the day, it was about so much more. Being present and meeting people where they were in that moment was an important part of the task I was assigned. On Wednesday, we were inspired by the young poet, Amanda Gorman, who recited her poem at the presidential inauguration. "For there is always light. If only we are brave enough to see it. If only we are brave enough to be it. The moments shared with my colleagues and with the community were somehow answering the call to be the light and to be the hands and feet of Christ and share love and compassion to all that we meet.

Let us pray –

*Gracious and loving God, help us to be brave enough to see the light and be the light to your people. Let us see and let us listen in our own homes, within our families and our church family and to our neighbors, friends and to strangers in our community – let us see and let us hear the hope, fear, peace and gratitude that folks may be experiencing. Remind us to be present and keep our hearts and minds open to share the love and light of Christ. We thank you for this glorious day and give you thanks for the faithful staff and leadership of this church that have carried us through these crazy times and have given us hope. For they have answered the call to be the light and will lead us forward in this New Year.*

For it's in Christ name that we pray, Amen.