



When I was trying to figure out what to do with life after college, I spent a few summers as a camp counselor at Lutheran Memorial Camp, located about an hour north of Columbus. That if this whole pastor thing was really worth considering, maybe some time in outdoor ministry would be a good test. Now, a couple weeks before the youth started showing up to the 400 acres of beautiful woodlands, they had all of us late teens and early twenty-something's come to the camp. Some of us, like me, were brand new and didn't

really know what the heck we were getting ourselves into; others had been doing the whole camp counseling thing for a while, and it was just another summer shaping the younger children of God's hearts and minds. So, to start, they had all us young adults do those most annoying ice breakers to try to get to know each other better. Then, they wanted all of us newbies, especially, to start to come out of our shell, and broaden our leadership horizons for all the youth we were about to be responsible for in the months to come.

For that, they took us out to the zipline course. Now, I am not petrified of heights, necessarily, but I also do not go out of my way to climb as high off the ground as I possibly can either. Nevertheless, one-by-one, we would be strapped and harnessed in to start climbing the wall before we would be zipped down this seemingly forever line over ditches and brush and trees. Oddly enough, it turned out to be a bit of a thrill ride my first time. I got a whole 'nother level of appreciation for the Psalmist's take that we heard this morning: "For as the heavens are high above the earth, so great is your steadfast love for those who fear you." And yet, as much as that soaring in the air was a bit of a thrill ride for me, a different, but even holier thrill was about to emerge on the ground level.

Along the edge of those beautiful 400 acres of woodlands was a place called Homestead with old rustic large cabins. Although the main portion of the camp had the ones with actual electricity and large bathrooms and normal kitchen operations for meals, at this end of the grounds, there was no electricity whatsoever. The bathroom was an outhouse. The only way to cook was over a fire. For most young people, such an immense lack of modern amenities may be the most grueling nightmare ever imaginable. However, smart phones and iPads and wireless whatever else had not quite reached the fever peak level it has now. So, rather surprisingly, for many children of God who ventured out to that earthly edge of human living, they actually ended up enjoying it, wanting to do it all over again the next summer. And perhaps the most important reason of all was what would happen the last night we were together for that respective week.

We camp counselors and youth, maybe about 20 of us or so, would gather around the campfire. We would do the usual songs with guitar and some prayers and some Scripture, but we would offer the young people the opportunity to share their faith story: however much they would be comfortable in expressing to the group they bonded over no lights and no plumbing and no microwaves. In the end, plenty of stories would be shared of struggle with school or family even the church; some who struggled over that last part of the Psalmist's verse that we so easily overlook. "For as the heavens are high above the earth, so great is your steadfast love *for those who fear you.*" Far too many were under the impression that it was just normal to be scared of God; that God was this high and mighty being, soaring far above that zip-line ruling with intimidation and guilt and fear, some of which was embodied in the school, in their family, even in the church.

When I first drove up to that camp thinking about all the new responsibilities to take care of young people for the next few months, I never thought about needing to take care of some theology. That we late teens and early twenty-something's, many of us didn't know what the heck we were supposed to do with life, and yet we were still called to do our part in thoroughly shattering the understanding that you must be scared of God in order to have any kind of a relationship with the Divine. We had to reinforce to far too many youth that as much of a thrill ride it was to be up on zip lines and pool diving boards, the most important thrill ride was Jesus Christ coming down to our ground level and into our hearts, and never ever leaving.

When we finished sharing our faith stories, we would often encourage the youth to bring out their mattresses from the old rustic cabins and sleep under the stars. Because it was there that we would fully understand what the Psalmist was proclaiming: "For as the heavens are high above the earth, so great is your steadfast love for those who [are not scared of God with all the intimidation and guilt and fear]," but "so great it is [God's] steadfast love for those [with a reverence of the grace and new life in our most awe-inspiring Lord]." So, when they looked at those precious stars, we could fully reassure them, that God was as much down here beside them, as God was up there. And no matter how their faith story turned out, there will always be one constant, God will always be in their and all our stories, and will absolutely refuse to leave; as if all our lives are far more beautiful than even 400 acres of woodlands, all of our lives a most wonderful thrill ride for God to graciously join forever. And for that Greatest News of all, we most certainly give thanks to God, indeed! Amen!