



Come this time tomorrow, we *hope* there's going to be a bit more rejoicing in the air, not just with a baby making his presence known to the world, but also a bit of rejoicing that his mother no longer has to carry him for months on end; a bit of rejoicing that warm cuddles and snuggles will be part of the standard operating procedure for a while. However, we are more than fully aware that not even for tomorrow alone, or any day after that, will it be entirely full of rejoicing. There will be frustration and sleeplessness and hunger not just for a newborn and his parents, but his toddler siblings, who are still under the impression that they are and should always be the center of the whole universe. So, with all due respect to Paul and his writing in Philippians, who encourages us to "rejoice...always" and "not worry about anything": sorry, Paul, that's not always going to be the case.

It's not always going to be full of rejoicing when the young infant makes his way into his new room soon enough, even if the whole family, but most especially Sarah, has done their best to make it as enjoyable and relaxing of a space as possible for him. It starts with the pictures hanging around his crib: postcards of the national parks, as we hope to raise all our children with an appreciation of nature and wanting to go on adventures, to experience the world in all the beauty it has to offer.

A few years ago, before all these babies came into the picture, Sarah and I traveled to a family wedding in Iowa. And we figured since we didn't make it out to that part of the country very often, we might as well make the trek to the Badlands, a national treasure that is often overlooked in the grand scheme of people's bucket lists for the more famous parks of Yellowstone or the Grand Canyon or the Rocky Mountains. Nevertheless, amidst the nearly 250,000 acres of rugged beauty with geological masterpieces dating back to God only knows how many millions of years ago, there were plenty of adventurous opportunities for climbing up and down the rocky terrain. No, it was no where near the monumental heights of the Grand Canyon or the Rockies, but still enough of a physical undertaking for novice-level us anyway. Regardless, there were seemingly countless picturesque views that led to whole-hearted rejoicing.

And then, all of a sudden, there was a shout behind us. Someone had taken a fall. Although not quite as high up from the ground, but enough of an issue for the walker adventurer who couldn't walk anymore. Sarah always insists that she never works in any nursing capacity on her days off, but nevertheless she went into action for a short while before paramedics arrived. He would be okay, and yet, it wasn't okay. All these plans made to experience significant rejoicing at such panoramic-adoration views, and it instantly vanished into the deepest frustration and disappointment and even anger at himself. Sorry, Paul, but as much as we would like, we cannot always rejoice. We can't always stop worrying about our bones and overall health conditions and plans going awry. Sorry, Paul: we're human, after all. It's going to happen.

Come to think of it, that's why so many people in this country and throughout the world make the trek to our national parks. They want a taste of peace and tranquility and beauty and wonder and pure serenity. They yearn for these eye-popping majestic reasons to rejoice. And so, we must ask if it is, in fact, possible that they can find those precious reasons to rejoice in the church as well. Can they find it in the place and people who cling to the hopeful words of "Rejoice in the

Lord always” and “not worry about anything,” but still fully recognize that that’s not always going to work? Can the church be just as much for the people who seem to be always rejoicing, who seem to be so happy and full of life; can the church be just as much for them as those who are struggling to rejoice, those who are struggling to find reasons for any hope at all?

Can the church be for those who try desperately to have their own children but simply cannot? Can the church be for those who frantically search for any possible way to feed their family? Can the church be for those who fall as those who rise from the depths? Because, with all due respect to Paul, this Lord of ours is just as much for those who cannot always pull off the rejoicing. Not only that, this Lord of ours joins us in our worrying. This Lord comes down with us when we fall. And for however long it takes, this God insists on sticking it out with us from the depths of it all to help us find just the right beauty to empower us forward: perhaps through a complete stranger at the bottom of a ladder. Perhaps through a night-shift nurse so that a new mother can sleep for a little while. Perhaps through a family in Christ who will always cling to the reasons in this life to rejoice, but will still be the family in Christ when the worry takes over, too.

So, yes, starting tomorrow, it would be nice if this new addition to the world would always be happy and rejoicing over the littlest and biggest of things in life. But we know that’s not always going to happen. And we need him to know that that’s okay. We need him to know he’s going to be loved anyway. And we need him to know that God insists on that being the Gospel for him, too. We need him to experience a church that will be that embodiment of hope no matter how rocky this mortal trek may be along the way. We need him to know that nothing can possibly happen in this life to separate him or any of us from the love of God in Christ Jesus, our Lord. And for that Greatest News of all, we most certainly give thanks to God, indeed! Amen!