



After our first year of seminary, it was the expectation that we wanna-be pastors would find a local hospital or nursing home or veterans' care facility to serve as de-facto chaplains for a summer to better hone our pastoral care skills. And although I did my best to stay near the campus in Columbus, Ohio, I ended up at the Lutheran Hospital of Indiana. Not a big deal, but that medical facility happened to be in Fort Wayne, which, evidently, was one

of the highest concentrations of those...other Lutherans: those Lutheran Church – Missouri Synod Lutherans. Now, I will be the first to admit that for many of my naïve younger years, I was under the impression that all the LCMSers resided in the Show Me State of Missouri, as their name so went, but I guess that was not the case.

So, several of us ELCAers and LCMSers, along with a Presbyterian and a Seventh Day Adventist thrown in for good measure, would learn alongside each other to be better in the compassion and empathy departments; to be, but a glimpse, of the boundless-loving Jesus Christ alongside hospital beds and beyond. One of those...other Lutherans was a man named Eli. Eli seemed to be a fashion aficionado with the trendiest shoes, the sleekest glasses, perfectly curated sideburns, and to top it off, he always had a toothpick in his mouth, as if it was the final touch to convince the rest of the world just how cool he was when he walked into any room. And yet, we from the ELCA side of things still couldn't quite agree with him on many parts of church operation: from women serving in leadership positions to who exactly could partake of Communion or seemingly the whole demeanor of the church in its ministry to the world.

But another thing about that coolest Eli: he knew his Bible backwards and forwards: perfect for those hospital patients who knew their fair share of the Scripture, too, and wanted to have an on-the-spot individual Bible study with a random student chaplain to help pass the time. Now, while all of us wanna-be pastors did our rounds with our respective medical floors in the building in the afternoon, during the morning, we would all gather in the basement for check-in sessions as well as classes to go over whatever reading material we were expected to dive into during the evening hours. Oddly enough, a few of those classes focused on none other than the Book of Job: an absolutely essential part of the Bible to dive into some of the oldest questions for us humans to keep us up at night, including for those who can hardly sleep at all in a hospital with all the poking and prodding that goes on, even in the middle of the darkest hours. The age-old questions of suffering, and why in the world does this Almighty, all-powerful, and all-loving God allow it all to happen to us.

However, I still remember when we were drawing our study of this wonderful, but most agonizing part, of Scripture to a close, and one of us pesky ELCAers said, "It just comes down to this: stuff happens, but God loves us enough to stick it out with us through all the stuff." Except, he didn't say, "stuff," but had a bit more...colorful language to describe the vast array of our life happenings. Better yet, Eli laughed hard enough that it almost broke his toothpick apart. Because we ELCAers and LCMSers couldn't agree on many things of church operation, but we could agree on that. "Stuff happens, but God loves us enough to stick it out with us through all the stuff." That is something we could carry not just from the basement of a hospital, but from the

depths of our own stuff: our own wonderings, our own questions, our own doubts, our own struggles with organized religion, yes, including for the wanna-be pastors. We could carry that most awe-inspiring Gospel to the bedsides of patients with their own seemingly bottomless pits of fears and worries, and carry it even further beyond those hallowed walls of God-loving ministry inside.

It is the Gospel that applies to any medical facility and sanctuary and classroom and kitchen and back porches and mountains and hills and valleys and everywhere in between throughout this entire universe, where no where is beyond God's grace, including for those who wonder if the stuff is just too much for God to handle anymore. Except, today, we heard about God responding out of a whirlwind, a whirlwind that is very much swirling in our broken, but beautiful, midst today.

Because, the Gospel still insists that if you are at your wits end with doctors and surgeons and the so-called medical experts not being able to figure out what's going with you or your loved one, rest assured, God has a whirlwind of hope for you. If you're not so sure whatever stuff you have in your life is worth caring about, and you even have some more...colorful language to describe it, because it's just...that much to have to bear, God has a whirlwind of love just for you. If you're not so sure about what the whole Bible thing is trying to tell you, or if you have your fair share of struggles with Job or whatever else Scripture entails or even with the church as a whole, God has more than a whirlwind of compassion, and never giving up on you. If you're not so sure if God can possibly be in your life with whatever you've done or didn't do that still keeps you up at night, God has unleashed a most life-saving whirlwind in Jesus Christ for you, not to mention the Holy Spirit that has rushed into your life from the very beginning. And no matter the stuff you endure, no matter the...colorful language you use to describe it; that Holy Spirit will majestically swirl within you all the way to the end and beyond. As if the Gospel, in fact, remains true: nothing can happen in this life to separate us from the relentless whirlwind of the love of God brought to life in Christ Jesus, our Lord, for Job, for Eli, for you, for the whole world. And for that Greatest News, we most certainly give thanks to God, indeed! Amen!