



Pastor Jim was called to my home congregation for an interim period. By the time he arrived to us, he had been doing the whole pastor thing since the late 1950s, serving congregations in Ohio and Pennsylvania and Michigan, even with a stop in the Soviet Union, ministering with the English-speaking people in Moscow in the mid-1960's. Safe to say, his faith took him to places I have no interest in going, but there was just something about Pastor Jim, and not because he was talented enough that he even served in the national office of the Lutheran Church in America, one of the predecessor bodies of our Evangelical Lutheran Church in America. No, there was something about Pastor Jim, who by the time he came to us, had been doing this whole pastor thing for quite a while, and had witnessed his fair share of changes in entire denominations and congregations and whole countries;

it would have been more than understandable that during his interim time with us that he would be a crochety and cranky old man dissatisfied with the direction of the church going forward. Instead, he had this contagious Resurrection joy about him. He exemplified the words to the opening verse of the Psalm in a different way: "Teach us to number our days that we may apply our hearts to wisdom."

But Pastor Jim's wisdom was acting as if each day was an opportunity to experience and live as if Jesus had triumphed over sin and death, and not just for the heavenly realm, but for this lifetime too.

Now, part of Pastor Jim's responsibility for that one or so year stint with us was leading the Confirmation class on Sunday mornings. It may not be overly smart for me to admit out loud, but I remember next to nothing for my 7<sup>th</sup> grade year of Catechism material, except one day. We were meeting in our usual room right by the top of the stairs on the second floor, seemingly tucked away in the corner of the church building that is coming up on 100 years of age now. In that room, off to the right, was a closet filled with those stereotypical Christmas pageant costumes, all of which appeared to be old enough to have been around since the second Christmas after Jesus was born, collecting dust to show that they had been worn by every generation of children since the beginning of Christ's church on earth.

And so, it was in that very room on some random Sunday morning, that Pastor Jim asked us to get out the *Lutheran Book of Worship* hymnals, those green books that filled every Lutheran church pew for three decades starting in the late 1970's, right in the wheelhouse of Pastor Jim's ministry. He would have us junior high students, who may not have exactly paid much attention to the words in the hymnal by that time in our life; he would have us pick any random hymn, and tell him one verse from that song, when he could then respond with not only the name of that hymn, but the number in that green book that included almost 600 of them. Now, to most middle school-aged youth, that random Sunday morning may have been the most colossal waste of time to hear this veteran pastor spew out hymn titles and numbers. But, for some reason, that is basically the only memory I have for that entire year in Confirmation, because there was just...something about Pastor Jim. It appeared that he wasn't digging into the file cabinets of his vast mind when he spouted off all that impressive information. Instead, it was as if he was joyfully sifting through the depths of his heart. Because with every hymn title came a smile, every number came a chuckle.

After all, Pastor Jim would certainly agree with the most historic cliché in the church that we stand on the shoulders of giants, but Pastor Jim wouldn't tell of you of pastoral colleagues and bishops. Instead, he would tell you about the people who inspired him all the more to count each day as an opportunity to experience and live as if Jesus had triumphed over sin and death, not just for the heavenly realm, but in this lifetime, too. Pastor Jim would tell you of the person who got to the church early to take care of the flowers in the courtyard before the sun rose. Pastor Jim would tell you about the

administrators who had type out every single bulletin and acted as if it was an honor to do so. Pastor Jim would tell you about the custodians who were expected to make a boiler keep going even if it had been around since the beginning of Christ's church on earth. Pastor Jim would tell you about the people who sewed together those Christmas pageant costumes, that have somehow managed to stand the test of time over decades of youth acting like shepherds and magi and Josephs and Marys. Pastor Jim would tell you about all such people who he sang those hymns beside in Michigan and Pennsylvania and Ohio, and even in the Soviet Union, and made the music all the more powerful and with enough of an impact to remember for a lifetime. There was just something about Pastor Jim who had me convinced that music could be an inspiration to believe as if Jesus Christ had triumphed over sin and death, and that it wasn't reserved for the heavenly realm, but for this lifetime, too.

Unfortunately, Pastor Jim's earthly ministry drew to a close a couple weeks ago at 93 years of age, and I have a feeling the Resurrection joy was still churning within him to the end and even beyond that, because the Resurrection insists on showing up to any tomb of mortality on this earth thousands of years after it first happened to change a world forever. And I wouldn't be surprised if someone could rattle off whatever random verse of a hymn, he could still respond with a title and a smile, and then a number with a chuckle, remembering the giants who maxed out on the Resurrection joy in courtyards and offices and boiler rooms and tucked away corners of old church buildings with ancient Christmas pageant costumes. Because with each precious child of God in the eyes of Pastor Jim, was yet another holy nudge to keep on singing even in the face of changing denominations and congregations, and whatever struggles of life and aging and even death itself. Evidently, there's just too much Resurrection joy flowing not just for the heavenly realm, but in this lifetime too. And for that Greatest News of all proclaimed by the Pastor Jim's and all the giants along the way that have more than sustained Christ's church on earth with the help of the Risen Lord, to be sure, we most certainly give thanks to God for all of them, indeed! Amen!