



I still remember the green banner that hung over the altar at the church where I grew up going to on Sunday mornings. And for the longest time, I was convinced that whoever put it together made a rather embarrassing mistake. On the left side was this weird looking rendition of the letter A, almost like a messed-up triangle, and on the right was this horseshoe-

appearing O. Of course, I'm sure some children's sermon came along and set me straight: the wisest women of the church responsible for all those etchings and sewings, in fact, knew very well what they were doing. Evidently, there were other languages out there in the world, beyond the one I grew up learning about, including a language so incredibly ancient to put the English one to shame. Nevertheless, on that banner that seemed to hang on that altar almost every Sunday from Easter to Christmas times was a proclamation of the Gospel: God was the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end. Interesting enough for a children's sermon and even a big kid sermon, for that matter, but at that time, I was much more interested in the in-between times of eternity: the here and now.

Now, as the years went by I became slightly fascinated enough with the beginning and the end: how exactly did God pull it off from the start, whether a literal 7-day Creation or a big bang or something else, and how exactly does God envision bringing it all to a close: will it be trumpet blasts or people being lifted up to the heavens or restoring the entire Creation to its intended beauty or something else beyond our knowing; while also remembering part of the Gospel proclamation that there is, in fact, no ending whatsoever to the love of God brought to life in Jesus Christ. Again, interesting material enough for a children's sermon or a big kid sermon, too, but I would never lose the appreciation for the in-between time, the here and now of God's living among us, and empowering us to being part of bringing God's love to life.

So, when I arrived at seminary, a place where you're encouraged to consider the beginning and the end and everything in between, for that matter, we had this campus pastor, who had a voice that I believed was the female equivalent of Sir David Attenborough, the one who is responsible for many narrations over the breath-taking scenery displayed in National Geographic specials, not only showing us the amazing wonders of this Creation, but encouraging us to do our part in taking care of it in the here and now. But the fondest memory I have of our campus pastor was when she took a group of teenagers to a cemetery, oddly enough: a place where people tend to focus on beginnings and endings when walking amongst the tombstones. Instead, the pastor had them gather around and encouraged them to focus on the little line in between all the years displayed on the granite stonework. And in her majestic voice, she read this poem:

*I knelt there at the headstone
of one I love and cried.
Name with dates of birth and death
were perfectly inscribed.
I pondered these two dates
and how little they both mean
when compared to the tiny dash
that lies there in between.
The dash serves as an emblem
of our time here on the earth*

*and although small, it stands for all
our years of life and worth.
And our worth will be determined
by how we live each day.
We can fill our dash with goodness
or waste our life away.
To ourselves, as well as others,
let's be honest, kind and true,
and live our lives the very way
we know God wants us to.
Let's look for opportunities
to do a worthy deed,
showing love and understanding
to those who are in need.
For if our hearts are full of love
throughout our journey here,
we'll be loved by all who knew us
and our memory they'll hold dear.
And when we die, those memories
will bring grateful loving tears
to those whose lives were touched
by the dash between our years.*

That poem served as a starting point for a little slightly bigger kid sermon by the pastor for those teenagers, who didn't exactly have to think about eternal beginnings and endings, but the ending of high school and the beginning of college or job or big kid life, in general. Life tends to be full of those kinds of transitions and we have plenty of Gospel material to offer hope by the Alpha and the Omega of it all. But I hope we remember the precious in-betweens, where God resides just as much.

I like to think that for those teenagers, and for any other age precious child of God, that we need not take for granted the preciousness of the long car ride from home to the soccer game however many hours away, giving thanks for the other passengers, who somehow have just enough love to want to be with us through it all. Or the comfort of a study group getting together nights before a seemingly impossible exam: that even if we do not get all those answers, or all the answers to any eternal theological question right, there's somehow going to be enough grace to insist that love will still stand after it's all said and done. The in-betweens of waiting for medical results and the strolls along the lakeside and the sometimes seemingly never-ending day-to-day grind of big kid living: that this is not just the God of the beginning and the ending, but certainly everything in between, too.

And on this Christ the King Sunday, for those teenagers, and any other age precious child of God, the ultimate Gospel does not sit on some heavenly throne, but that God insists on setting up a just-as-holy seat in the depths of our very heart: from our very beginning, for the most treasured in-between times, and yes, our mortal ending, but beyond even that. As if the Gospel might just be true after all, for the children's sermons and the big kid sermons, too: nothing can happen in this life to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus, our Lord. It is the Greatest News for the beginning, the end, and absolutely everything in between as well. So, for that Greatest News of all, we most certainly give thanks to God, indeed! Amen!

- *The Dash In Between* (Ron Tranmer)