



We Lutherans have heard all the jokes about us being the best in the whole church of handling all the curveballs from organized religion and culture and technology and whatever else. Not that there actually too many human beings in general out there who thoroughly crave change in their life, but we Lutherans have dealt with the brunt of the stereotype over the years. We have heard the corniest of jokes, including the standard, “How many Lutherans does it take to change a light bulb?

Change!?! Who said anything about change?” Granted, we have developed a reputation, to be sure, but it isn’t always about just wanting things to stay the same because that’s what our grandparents and their grandparents did. But, sometimes, there have been moments in our life when the church absolutely captivated us, and gave us joy and hope amidst a time when it was a struggle to find such things. So, when that happens to us, we just don’t want to lose that feeling as if we just experienced a glimpse of the very heart-warming goodness of God.

For me, one of them was my preaching professor in seminary. Some of the best sermons I ever heard were from him. He didn’t just make Scripture stories from the first century come to life. He had me believing as if that story was still going on today. And not only that, he had me falling in love with that story. So, obviously, I did not want that feeling to end. Yes, I knew I had to move on from seminary at some point, but I wanted him to stay there, just in case I could come back for a homecoming weekend or some other random event. I wanted him to stay right there in case I ever needed a spiritual refill, of sorts.

And then, things changed. Things in the church changed. Less people were going to seminary. Budgets had to be cut. The outlook was far from hopeful for that institution. And so my beloved professor accepted a call to serve a congregation in Virginia (of course, without checking with me first, or any of his other students he had reeled in with his captivating proclamation of the Gospel). And then, a few years later, a certain virus emerged seemingly all over the world, and things... changed, to put it rather mildly. But amidst that change, even the oldest-school Lutherans caved in to the one of their most feared trepidations in their entire history, that being technology. And so, on a near weekly basis, I would find a certain Facebook page for a Lutheran church in Virginia. Evidently, every once in a while, some good can come amidst the dreaded change.

He still had it in him. And I hoped beyond hope he would stay right there, right there not just for those Virginians, but for his former student as well. Because he would still offer up those moments of not just making a story come to life, but to fall in love with it, and when you have those moments of when you almost feel as if you’re having an experience of the holy, you just don’t want to let it go. And then, came last Advent, when I heard of his impending retirement (again, without asking me first).

He wasn’t supposed to go. He was too good. And when you find that goodness, one can at least hope that God can find a way to ensure that that goodness in whatever form it comes, to just stay there for us, not just for us oldest-school Lutherans, but for all people who must face their fair share of so much change in a lifetime, when people come and go, and jobs appear and vanish, and financial circumstances alter, and all the other curveballs that emerge without checking with us first. It would be nice if God could just find a way to ensure that when the captivating goodness happens, when we find the person or place that helps us experience a precious glimpse of the Divine, if God could only find a way to ensure that never changes, that would be most wonderful, to say the least. But needless to say, a few weeks ago, I could no longer find him from that pulpit space.

I wonder, if every once in a while, we need healing for all the changes that emerge in our life, some of which we do not see coming at all, and some we do, but no matter how much we expect the ones we do, they still manage to seemingly tear our hearts apart. We often do not offer these quarterly laying on of hands and anointing of oil on Communion Sundays, but perhaps it is rather fitting that we do today. Because one constant through all the changes of preaching styles and languages spoken and hymnals and buildings and pews and carpets and clothing and plenty of other matters that we Lutherans have fought tooth-and-nail over the generations, one of the constants has been Communion.

Now, there have been some slight alterations in the frequency and the expectations to receive it and other seemingly minor details, but through it all, a piece of bread, and a few drops of wine and eventually grape juice, in that utter simplicity that has stood the test of time is all the hope and joy we need. In that morsel, and in that sip, is bringing the story to life in us, no matter what our past accounts of living are that we bring to the table.

In that seemingly quickest moment in our experience of worship is God's captivating reminder that God insists that the story is no where close to ending, but that it continues in your life. And that through all the changes that seem to dominate our being, goodness can somehow, somehow, still emerge.

Around the same time I heard of my preaching professor's retirement, that congregation sang a hymn I never heard before. And yes, sometimes we Lutherans are convinced that the only captivating church music is what is composed before 1950, but every once in a while we cave in. There was something about the tune: almost like a hope-filled bounce to it, as if Christ did not just jump from the dead long ago. He's still doing it. He's still doing it every time we taste and see the most captivating goodness of God in Communion: as if even death will not separate us from God's love. The refrain still hits home too, "O Christ, surround me." And we pray this day, through all the changes, through all the setbacks, through all the curveballs that come our way: Christ surround us all with not only a belief in the story, but a love so deep for it that we cannot help ourselves but join in the most joyous dance to last all eternity. So, for that Greatest News of all, we most certainly give thanks to God, indeed! Amen!