



My first job was a cashier at a grocery store, where I began to believe that the fate of the entire universe rested on customers being able to see every item scanned to be the same exact price as they saw in the aisles behind them, and that their coupons would be discounted to the precise cent; otherwise, the world would fall apart. But obviously by far the most important part was the paycheck that would minimally venture into a savings account for some sense of fiscal responsibility, but more often would go to the worthy causes of the nearby movie theater and sugary foods and drinks. Now, over time, there would be these mutterings about IRAs and 401Ks and 403Bs and flexible spending and health saving accounts: all this adulating nonsense. But once the pastor thing happened, and the marriage thing came along, we knew we had to cave in to the dreadful meeting with a financial planner.

As we were getting to know each other, of course, it came up about the clergy line of work for me. Immediately he let me know he was Catholic, as if meeting with a financial planner wasn't...interesting enough. But I assured him I always thought we played for the same team anyway, so that wouldn't be an issue. But then he started to share how he felt called to live out his faith beyond the IRAs and 401Ks. After all, that particular branch expected their agents to dedicate time out in the community. Granted, there could have been some ulterior motive there, because that looks good for business and all, but this Matthew, of sorts, was different.

Because, at the time, we lived in an area out of state where there was this bridge that seemed to drastically separate two different worlds. On one side was near a lakefront with picturesque architecture, successful businesses, a place where tourists wasted as much money as I did as a teenager; but on the other side, was a place with one of the highest crime rates in the entire state, a place where you may not want to venture into at night, where others thought the people there made their choices for how their city turned out and they must figure out on their own how to put it back together, a place where many people seemingly lost all hope imaginable. Oddly enough, we needed to cross that bridge for our own attempt at future stability, into an area where some business were attempting to be part of some hopeful restoration. But for the building we walked into, most of the workers insisted on living and doing their community service on what was considered to be the more desirable end of the bridge. But not this 21st century Matthew. It's not just that God calls the Matthews of the world; it's that God calls the Matthews to serve the parts of the world that, deep down, we're not sure really deserve the Gospel.

For this particular Matthew, he insisted on helping raise up community gardens and making connections for affordable housing and setting up neighborhood festivals for joy and laughter and passion to somehow emerge in a place where others could not possibly believe any of that could happen in that dreadful place. Sometimes it takes the Matthews of the world with job titles automatically assumed to be the worst of the worst, to be from places that are believed to be beyond hope; sometimes it takes the Matthews who are thought to have no reason in sharing the Gospel at all to be the ones who fall in love with it the most, to be the ones to firmly believe that God has this astounding love that can reach every single place throughout the world. Sometimes it takes the Matthews to help the rest of us realize just how powerful the Gospel still remains thousands of years after this Nazareth boy went into every forsaken community he could walk into in his earthly lifetime.

So, needless to say, it turned out to be not as dreadful of a meeting as imagined. Because, evidently, God can emerge in a financial planner, around a desk filled with spreadsheets and pie charts. Evidently, God can love the other side of a bridge meant by humans to separate entire worlds, and to be a stumbling block for hope to cross over at all. Yes, we started our own plan for some future stability, but we left with something greater. We left knowing that Matthews are still being called, and not just being called to serve in the more desirable parts of towns and faith communities, but in places the rest of us aren't so sure we should go.

There's just something about the Matthews. They are somehow thoroughly convinced, that if God can call them, then God can undoubtedly reach over there with the same love that lifted up the Nazareth boy to the Resurrection heights. That as much as we do our human best to instill all the terms and exclusions and all the fine print restrictions on the grace of God, Jesus Christ will always find a way to rip it all apart, because the Gospel will not stay in one place. It will not stay silent. It will thoroughly unleash all the joy and laughter and a passion wherever it walks into then, now, and forevermore. So, for the Matthews of the world, who will never stop in proclaiming that hope for all the world, we most certainly give thanks to God, indeed! Amen!