



Last week, there was this most heart-warming story that started to gain immense attention from all of us who long to hear for a bit more of good news in the midst of not so pleasant updates about the world and how we humans are treating each other. It was about a four-year-old boy in North Carolina named Roman, whose parents separated and grandparents lived rather far away. And yet, for some reason, in the midst of perhaps not so-pleasant home circumstances, Roman started to insist on waking up in the morning with the focus on getting out the front door to start waving at people and saying, “Hi” to them, and not with an obligatory manners tone, but with an infectious

enthusiasm pitch to it, that eventually got the neighbors waving back and the delivery drivers and other passers-by, who just couldn’t help themselves but join in on the boy’s persistent positive attitude. But it didn’t stop there.

Eventually, the neighbors came by, knowing the street didn’t have other youth around. Instead, it was mostly more life-experienced adults, many of whom hardly knew each other even though they only lived hundreds of feet away from one another. It started with the older gentleman across the street, who would pull up a chair and sit beside the boy to join in on his waving and yelling, “Hey!” to everyone. Then, other neighbors started to follow: stopping by to talk with Roman, played games, eventually developing such strong friendships, that they were the ones who joined his mom at his soccer and baseball and basketball games, as Roman would always go up to his neighbor friends to give them a hug or a high-five in appreciation of them going above and beyond the normal, above and beyond us not going too far in extending kindness to strangers, because well, we don’t know what they’re like, going above and beyond in assuming the worst, going above and beyond of being okay with the fair share of differences and divisions that seem to matter more than anything right now.

So, with that in mind, you may not have even noticed it, but one of the differences amongst us churches was brought front and center a few minutes ago. Just so we’re clear: not all Bibles are the same. And not just because of translations between King James and Good News and NIV and NRSV, but also if you ever take time to compare Bibles in this building to some of our Roman Catholic neighboring sites, you will notice there are some books in their collection of Scripture that are not included in ours. One such example we heard today: the Wisdom of Solomon. So, if you were to make the trek a few streets over to St. John Bosco or Holy Family, and pull out one of their Bibles, in the midst of Job and the Psalms and Proverbs will be the Wisdom of Solomon, or better known for them as the Book of Wisdom. But for us Protestants, unless your Bible has that middle section in between the Old and New Testaments called the Apocrypha, that is somewhat meant to fill the historical timeline gap between the two testament sections, you will not find the Wisdom of Solomon in most of our Bibles. This isn’t meant to start a massive detour into a boring lecture, but just yet another reality of a few things that we children of God can’t quite agree on; and yet, every once in a while, we can brave over to something different and still manage to obtain a precious bit more of the Gospel.

Because, oddly enough, there are scholars who believe that the Wisdom of Solomon was written a little over 2,000 years ago, to Jewish youth as there was this fear of them being tempted by the culture of the time. As if that same worry isn’t still being dealt with by us in the church two millennia later. Oddly enough, in the next month here at Divinity, we’ll be hosting a blessing of the backpacks, to hopefully help young people feel that God will insist on being with them for the upcoming school year and beyond. We’ll also extend our blessing on teachers and faculty and staff and bus drivers and custodians and our Sunday school teachers, as they collectively impact youth’s lives for just as

interesting of cultural times as they evidently were for the writers of this wisdom literature long, long ago.

Safe to say, we're still worried about them. We're worried there's not enough God in their life. We're still trying to figure out the right words on paper and screens and in-person to hopefully reel them and their families into more Bible-reading and worship-participating and all-around church-being. But, oddly enough, that's one thing we actually share in common with our Roman Catholic and Methodist and Presbyterian siblings in Christ; we're all trying to figure out how to reel them in. Not that such intentions are bad necessarily, but hopefully we can leave some room in the depths of our worried and anxious hearts for the possibility of the youth reeling us in, too. Hopefully there's still enough space in our minds that the Gospel can be proclaimed on long-forgotten pages, in the lives of neighbors we haven't quite mustered the strength to extend more than the basic manners greeting, and even in the youngest of life, who God insists on being with, no matter where they go.

Because a four-year-old boy experienced some not so pleasant circumstances with his family. A four-year-old boy could have dipped into more than understandable sadness, more than understandable despair and not want anything to do with the world at all, as with many more life experienced adults would have understandably done as well. And yet, for some reason, something was ignited in a four-year-old to do something different. Something was going on in him to go out the door into a world he had no business believing in, and he did something that should have been so basic with all children of God, but isn't as much anymore; he did something that should be so standard even amongst the church-goers, but is becoming more difficult to find. He in his own captivating four-year old way embodied love and kindness and hope and even embodied God to reel in a neighborhood. So, for the youngest children of God who defy expectations and proclaim the Gospel in their own astounding way, thanks be to God, indeed! Amen!

For Roman's story from CBS News:

<https://www.cbsnews.com/news/roman-butzlaff-loneliness-north-carolina-community/>