



Mrs. Harris: she was the one. She was the one who challenged me when I was doing everything possible to avoid such things in my life at the time. I did put my name forward for student council in high school, but I will be the first to admit that only happened because I figured it would look, at least, slightly impressive for college admissions personnel. I remember our first meeting, though: other students with much more enthralling charisma and take-charge attitudes: actual leadership qualities that I had not quite mastered in my teenage years. And so, I was hoping to do just enough to get by: to be able to somehow still have my name attached to this supposedly more respected student organization to write in on a university application.

Mrs. Harris was not just our biology and introduction to chemistry and physics teacher; she was also the faculty advisor to student council. She asked if I could oversee this one bulletin board in the back hallway by the cafeteria doors. I would have to go to various sporting events along with band and choir concerts, take pictures and then post them for everyone to see, as if many teenagers are interested in such things making their way to lunch. Nevertheless, I went to a few such happenings at the school, and updated that board for a grand total of twice; again, hoping for just enough to get by. I thought I had miraculously found a high school leadership loophole: a responsibility of the least consequence that would hardly be noticed and still get the future impressiveness credit. Except, there was Mrs. Harris.

I had put my name forward again for the following year, filling out the required piece of paper before whatever form of haphazard election we had for such things. And then, as I was at my locker one day after school, there Mrs. Harris stealthily emerged out of nowhere. She smacked that paper firmly against the locker beside me, with this rather emboldened red marking: similar to the one seen on not the easiest tests she gave us for scientific matters; and these rather huge letters, as if she was trying to make a point or something: N-O. Evidently, Mrs. Harris was not going to allow me to just get by.

I obviously was not her biggest fan that day, as if it was her fault for my not overly committed teenage attitude. Of course, looking back, I suppose she was being the teacher families and communities hope for with their children. The teacher who believes in the youth, when they may not even believe it for themselves. The teacher who somehow knows what we are capable of, not just for future potential on a college campus, but even the impact we could make in our growing up years, when we are not always craving such influential responsibilities. The teacher who must recognize that not all students will respond well to such challenges, not to mention not all forms of criticism will be thoroughly appreciated by parents or family, to say the least, but the teacher who remains steadfastly committed to the precious children of God in their midst; who will stop at nothing to do their part in shaping them for the better. No pressure whatsoever navigating through all of that, on top of changing curriculums and school board oversights and district levies putting needed resources on the line. No pressure whatsoever.

And then, there is the church with our own share of eerily similar challenges. For the church is called and hoped to be the place and the people with this limitless supply of grace and compassion and mercy and forgiveness and love to all of God's children of all ages, including the people who just want to get by in life responsibilities, those who show up in sanctuaries for a grand total of twice in a church year, maybe a wedding or funeral thrown in there as well. The Divine supply must be the same for them as those who spend every possible moment in worshiping and praying and serving in and outside church building walls.

And not only that, but as the same Paul from long ago, who desperately needed that limitless supply of grace for himself, he had this staunch belief that every child of God was blessed with these gifts that could significantly impact communities of faith and the entire world, not just down the line; but right then and there. And so, there was this Divine yearning for us that we not only use those gifts just to get by enough and to impress others along the way; but to recognize the precious lives of all ages that could actually be improved, if we continue to learn and grow in putting that life-defining faith into action. So, yes, the church must be the earthly embodiment of a heavenly storehouse of love, but we remain called by God to follow the Hebrew prophets and Paul and Jesus Christ himself in working for the benefit of others, to bringing a bit more of the heavenly paradise to this broken but what God insists is still a beautiful earthly realm. It is a holy challenge for the church, to be sure, but one we cannot back away from, because too many talents and gifts are in our midst to not share it with the world.

Sometimes, it takes the Mrs. Harris' and teachers and all those who never gave up on us during the years when we may not have thought about such things: to give us just enough to convince us not to back down. The ones who never stopped believing in us. The ones who helped us catch a holy glimpse of the God who will never stop in cherishing us, yes, but also marvels to see just how we bring that hope to life for others to fall in love with the Greatest story that continues to unfold now. And it unfolds through those who struggle, those who aren't so sure what their gifts could possibly be on this earth, but also for the teachers who, for some reason, remain committed in shaping youth to never stop losing hope, in themselves, and the world who needs them, too. Because for some reason, God has not given up on any of us either. For some holy reason, God never will give up on you, and the children of God of all ages. So, for the teachers who do their part in helping us believe such Great News is meant for us too, thanks be to God, indeed! Amen!