

My father still farms about eleven hundred acres' worth of corn and soybeans in northwestern Ohio, and it hardly took anytime whatsoever to realize farming was not for me. The whole agriculture thing takes too much patience, too much common sense when it comes to tools and machinery, too much is beyond your control, too many late nights, too much passion for boring dirt and soil. I guess I just was never wired that way.

And yet that doesn't take away from the utmost respect I hold for my father and all farmers everywhere, for that matter. Without them, who knows where all our food would be coming from? Who knows what would happen to all this beautiful land that covers the overwhelming majority of this country? It may be the absolute last thing I would ever want to do in this lifetime, but nonetheless, I admire the ones who can and, evidently, love doing it.

Of course, farmers also share this deepest connection with many of Jesus' stories that the rest of us will never fully understand, as if Jesus was a closet-agricultural-enthusiast himself. So he says, "Very truly, I tell you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains

just a single grain; but if it dies, it bears much fruit.” With the whole farming thing, it’s not just about seeing up-close and personal these seeds falling from the planter down into the dirt and grime of the earth to produce an abundance of wheat, corn, soybeans, or whatever else soon enough. Farming is also about dying to your own human pride, to realize season-after-season that so much about this life is completely beyond your control. You are at the mercy of constantly-changing weather patterns and up-and-down shifts in Chicago Board of Trade market trends. You have to depend on the inner-workings of complex machinery with combines and tractors costing hundreds of thousands of dollars. You have to count on seed companies and the understanding of landowners when the yield doesn’t turn out quite the way you had hoped. You have to die to all that control in this life, and that obviously does not stop with the farmers.

However, the farmers also have to die to any sense of normalcy. They have to give up on any inkling of thought to just working 9-5 on weekdays, but instead working into all hours of the night before the slightest chance of rain comes in from the west. They have to give up

regular appearances at the dinner table with their family, knowing that the work they painstakingly continue in the fields will have a direct impact on other families eating throughout the world. Again, it doesn't just stop with the farmers, as all of us are called into plenty of life circumstances that are anything but normal: to be there for one another in the chaos of job loss, family discord, and even death itself.

And so farmers throughout the world are bringing the very message of our Savior to life, in the dirt and grime of the very soil that we so richly benefit from; and that Jesus, evidently, had a deep appreciation for too. Except, the very core of that message from the fields is not one we like to think about so much. However, the reality remains: that the Resurrection only works with the dead. The only way to rise is to die first. The only way to live forever is to die once for all. Yes, in the meantime, the church calls us to remember our baptism on a daily basis: to, every day, die to our sin and start anew. Die to the tensions that weigh us down. Die to the perfectionism that keeps us up at night. Die to everything that holds us back from proclaiming the Great News of our Savior in our own life each and every day.

However, in the end, no matter how much farmers or the rest of us can relate to this story from Jesus in our own respective faith journey: Jesus is not ultimately focusing on us dying to our pride, dying to our obsession to control everything in our life, or dying to the life of ease and normalcy. No, instead, Jesus is merely setting the stage for what *he* is about to do for the rest of us. That He, our Savior, our Messiah, our everlasting Hope, is about to go into death itself so that the rest of us may live; and live abundantly, at that. The stage is now set for a night, a week, that the world will never forget: when our Savior went all the way to the grave for all of us, into the grimmest part of our broken human condition, in order to raise us up not just in some distant heavens, but right here, right now; every day throughout this life and forevermore. And for that, we most certainly give thanks to God indeed! Amen.