

A couple weeks ago I had one niece playing in their final regular season volleyball game and then, the next night, another niece playing in her senior band night, as she marched on the football field for the final time in her high school career. So in between I had to stay at my parents' house: perfectly convenient and all. Except, within the last few years, my father thought it was a good idea for some creaturely additions down on the farm: a rooster and a hen. And, of course, the rooster has to do its rooster thing even before the sun rises for God-knows what reason!

So, as I was woken up even before the slightest crack of dawn, my initial reactions cannot possibly be shared publicly if I want to keep any position in the church whatsoever; and, obviously, the rooster could not possibly care less. Even though, I would like to press the mental snooze alarm in hopes of the slightest possibility of immersing myself into the deepest sleep in the history of humanity, to ride out his cockle-doodle-doo-ing; nevertheless, he has to do his rooster thing: crowing until the whole farm emerges in full-operation-mode. That's just what he's supposed to do, no matter how annoying, aggravating, and down-right antagonizing the rest of us may find his nature duties.

And I bring up my not-so farm friend, because at this point last year, we were celebrating the 500th anniversary of the Reformation; and we, for good reason, celebrated the greatness of the church with its rich history, the impact we've had on local communities and throughout the world, not to mention the great potential we have with, still, the church's one foundation in Jesus Christ, her Lord. And, as we reach year 501, hopefully, we are more, at least ever so slightly, willing to recognize the times for the church when it is...annoying, aggravating, and down-right antagonizing to both the members and the not.

Because the church has this tendency to never be satisfied. After all, there's still another child of God who's going hungry, there's still another who is not valued because of their skin color, there are still victims of violence, there's a family whose house is still in shreds after a hurricane, there's a teenager who's still desperately searching for a parent to love them. Evidently, it's just the church thing to do: to absolutely refuse to let us sleep through such inequality, injustice, the inhumanity of it all.

And that did not start with a most annoying, aggravating, and antagonizing Martin Luther with an ego that could fill all of Christendom half a millennia ago. That started with an annoying Moses set out to free an entire people. It continued with the most aggravating prophets who wouldn't allow that same people to take advantage of the poor, and, lest we forget, an utmost antagonizing carpenter's son, who wanted to completely revamp the understanding of the most mighty and all-powerful, yet grace-filled, God. And that same God continues to beg the church to keep that not-so-pleasant-for-human-beings tradition going.

Because, even though things may be just fine in our own respective homes, at least fine enough for us; the rooster-like church knows it isn't fine everywhere else. The rooster must know through its divinely-influenced DNA that the farmer cannot just bask in the warmth and all-around comforts of their own house, and simply pray to God to take care of the harvest through some heavenly combining means. No, the rooster has to do its rooster thing and uproot everyone within shouting distance

to rise from their slumber to take on the work needed done for people near and far.

Now, before we get too carried away, we will not forget one of our Reformation principles for the last 500+ years: that such works will not save us for eternity. Yes, they are most certainly needed for the general welfare of our families, friends, and neighbors, but it will not sway God one way or the other for the everlasting life portion. That antagonizing carpenter's son took care of that with that beyond-our-comprehension grace that drove so many people absolutely nuts, including many of us to this day.

And so I return to that dreaded rooster, who was made most famous with his appearance in the final days of Jesus' life, when the elite couldn't take the antagonism to their power anymore. Peter, who had his fair share of being annoyed and aggravated by this supposed Messiah, did exactly what Jesus predicted in flat-out denying even knowing that carpenter's son turned-Son-of-God for Peter and the rest of the disciples, and the whole world for that matter. Then, the rooster does its rooster thing: it crows, as if it's calling Peter out not just for his

denial, but for his betrayal, for his sin, for his utter embarrassment as a supposed disciple of Christ.

And over the centuries children of God have wondered if *that* is the main point to the church: to call out our sin, our denying that God should have any say in shaping our life not just for our own benefit, but for the betterment of our communities and the world; as well as our betrayal of the promises we made with our Confirmation vows or even the weekly opportunities to confess our sin with the intent to pull a completely repent-full 180 in the week to come; as if with each and every embarrassing act we make as supposed disciples of Christ, that we pierce our Lord and Savior just as much, if not more, than Peter himself did long ago.

However, what if we also stick with one of our Reformation tenets of being open to new ideas, even different interpretations of the Scripture itself? What if the rooster wasn't doing a rooster thing of instilling guilt or shame? What if the rooster crowed to call Peter to look into the eyes of Jesus, the Lord and Savior, Who, beyond Peter's comprehension, was still going to unleash forgiveness and mercy even

on his deathly way to the cross? What if the call wasn't to drive Peter into depression or self-hate, but to witness all the more just how deep this love of God runs not just through the One and only Son, but into the utter depths of our very soul, penetrating through all the fear and doubts along the way?

God continues to beg the church to do exactly that: not to instill guilt or shame or wondering if this God can ever possibly love someone like me? The church, yes, to the point of being annoying and aggravating and down-right antagonizing, is meant to drive the Greatest News into our daily living, so much so that it will drive us absolutely nuts with just how much this God not only loves us, but empowers us to do something holy with that love. The church, just like any dreadful rooster, is not meant to allow us to sleep through such sacred opportunities to bring that love of God to life; but just, as importantly, to see God at work too, including the work that has already saved us in Jesus Christ, still, our church's one and only foundation, then, now, and forevermore! Amen.