

Most of my friends, growing up, were significantly more fortunate than I was in the television-entertainment department, as they had the wonderful mystique of cable or satellite tv. For my family, we, instead, resorted to what was ironically dubbed, farmer-vision. We had this massive tower of an antenna on the side of our house, and there was this dial in the living room, where we could control where it pointed between our ten or so channels. The one thing we had going for us in our location of Upper Sandusky, Ohio, was that we were, basically, half-way between Toledo and Columbus. So, if we turned the antenna towards the north, we could reach channels 11, 13 and 24; whereas, if we pointed it just east of south, we could watch 4, 6, and 10 from the state capital.

Come six o'clock down on the farm, the standard operating procedure would involve a little maneuvering of that monstrosity of a reception-grabber, when we were often sitting down for dinner. When it came to the start of the local news, it really didn't matter where the antenna was pointing: the correspondents were spewing out their own rendition of the Ecclesiastes take on the world: "all is vanity and a chasing after wind."

Just look at what happened in our own back yard today, or, perhaps, what happened in Dayton just last night.

Nevertheless, when it came time for the weather, we often turned the antenna toward the north. Somehow, the Toledo meteorologists tended to forecast more correctly for us on the farm, at least. But, then, come the time for sports, we had to make sure we could tune into the Columbus stations for any potential news of our beloved Buckeyes on the gridiron. Of course, when it came 6:30, it, again, didn't matter whether we watched Dan Rather or Peter Jennings or Tom Brokaw; it was all the same: "all is vanity and a chasing after wind." Just look at what happened in the world today, or, perhaps, what happened in El Paso, Texas, yesterday. What's the point, after all?

Except, one anchor we would always cling to in spite of all the vanity of vanities broadcasted locally and over all the earth, for that matter, was a man named Dave Koehler, one of the talking-heads at WBNS-10TV out of Columbus for pretty much my entire childhood. He, also, became famous for many fans who packed the gridiron stadium for an Ohio State football team, as he served as the announcer for what many Ohioans still implore is

the Best Damn Band in the Land. Regardless of all that, Dave Koehler was more special for us in Upper Sandusky, because he was the brother of Andy Koehler, who ran the pharmacy uptown for nearly fifty of its now eighty-plus years of business on our main street.

And yet, by far more important, for those of us who were blessed to know Andy Koehler: he was the living proof that Ecclesiastes has it absolutely wrong; not everything is vanity. Not everything is merely chasing after thin air. Not everything in this life is meaningless. All you had to do was walk into the pharmacy uptown, or just before worship on Sunday morning in the middle of the pews at St. Paul's Lutheran Church, or even out in his own front yard when he was mowing, still in his business attire: Andy's contagious smile and insistent passion would captivate you into a completely different outlook on the world than what his brother reported. When you walked away from his presence, you couldn't help but have a lighter feel to your step, as if he had just reeled you into a hope that the God of the Resurrection is *still* in full operation.

Now I mentioned Andy *nearly* served fifty years running Koehler Drug, because about this time two years ago, Andy was diagnosed with

pancreatic cancer. Three months and he was gone, not only from his wife, his two daughters, two grandchildren, his brother Dave, nieces and nephews; but, also, for us in a small town that came to depend on the Andy Koehler's of the world; not just for pharmaceutical purposes, but to further convince us that not all is vanity and a chasing after wind, even when cancer continues to rear its awful ugly head far, far too often.

When it came time for his funeral, of course, his brother, Dave, spoke the final eulogy, and he brought up this poem he had heard about "The Dash." Because, in case you haven't noticed, if you ever walk amongst the tombstones, you will realize that most people's lives are reduced to two separate years of date with this miniscule dash in between; a person's entire life told by a single line. Nevertheless, behind that dash, as his brother said, was what they lived for, what they loved, their hopes and dreams. Dave said, "When looking at your little dash, Andy, no one did it better. You lived for your family, your community, your church, Koehler Drug Company, your employees." His brother eventually concluded, "if we live the dash *his* way, we cannot lose."

Except with all due respect to the Columbus news anchor, the most powerful truth of the Gospel, the ultimate anti-vanity of vanities outlook on the world; the Gospel says no matter how you live that dash, the promise is that end date, that is just as deeply etched into stone as the words of Ecclesiastes are etched into pages across the world, will both be proven wrong.

We heard it first-hand in that same funeral, when the pastor, who, by the way, was a die-hard Hoosier fan from Indiana: he spoke about one of Andy's final mortal days, when he was laying in a bed at the James Cancer Hospital on the campus of Ohio State, perfectly placed just outside the stadium he tailgated at on so many fall Saturdays throughout his life. Andy knew his end was drawing near, and the pastor made the drive down from Upper Sandusky to see him. And yet, Andy, still being full of jovial life in spite of impending death, asked the pastor to sit down at the foot of the bed and look out the window and asked what the pastor saw. The pastor said, "Yeah, that's the football stadium." Andy responded, "No! That's heaven!" Laughter, joy, life in spite of death, as if this life is not chasing after thin-air, but the most heart-filled moments imaginable.

Regardless of who wrote and shaped this portion of Ecclesiastes, whether it be Solomon or David or whomever else; Andy Koehler proved them wrong. It doesn't mean we should rip out those verses at all, because they give us permission to feel that way, including on days like today after two mass-shootings. It's as if God is giving us the needed human opportunity to go through those completely understandable emotions: to wonder if there is anything to this life, if it all is just chasing after thin air. God will allow us to have those human moments, but God insists that the pages of humanity's story be turned, including to a Resurrection that proves we are not chasing after nothing.

Instead, time and time again, we are being caught up by a relentless whirlwind of new life that has already been unleashed on the world when a tomb of hate, evil and death was shattered open. This is not vanity at all. This is God's never-ending gift of everlasting life not in some far-off distance, but right here, right now and forevermore. And for the Andy Koehler's of this world who will never let us forget it, we give thanks to God indeed! Amen!