

A few weeks ago, I was at a continuing education event in Columbus, because, evidently, we pastors could still learn a thing or two about doing church and all. The title of the conference was “Practical Evangelism,” because, the stereotype of us Lutherans still reigns rather prominently: we are not that *good* at sharing the *Good* News. Now, it wasn’t about training us in figuring how to evangelize people in the sense of reeling complete strangers into the light of the, obviously, perfect Lutheran church. It was about being more open to sharing our story with others, and even how to listen to the story better, not just in Scripture, but in the story that is still on-going in the lives of those around us, and making sure to listen to the entire story.

For instance, we could get rather pre-occupied with what happens on the mountaintop with Jesus and the miraculous appearances of Moses and Elijah. What exactly did that look like, for starters? Except, there is that rather interesting verse at the end, when Jesus orders his disciples to keep it all on the down-low until the Resurrection is taken care of, when, in fact, the fate of the entire world is taken care of for the good. So, in case we didn’t listen quite that well and put it all together, in the end: it is okay to talk about it now, it’s okay for all of us to talk about Great News.

So, one of the speakers meant to help us recognize the Good News going on not just in Scripture but in the world around us, was one of my former seminary professors in Dr. Wally Taylor, as we so called him, one of the leading scholars in the writings of Paul (Paul, who insisted on taking Jesus' word for it that it was more than okay for *him* to start spreading the Good News like wildfire, to say the least). Yes, Dr. Taylor knows his Bible, not to mention Greek, Hebrew, French, German, Latin, Spanish, but he still has his down-to-earth moments, too. I remember every Monday class I had with him in the fall started with a Powerpoint slide of the University of Nebraska football score from the Saturday before, since he grew up in the Cornhusker state. And yes, he had one of those dry senses of humor, where you better pay attention during his lectures to get the joke, or he would give off just enough a little chuckle, himself, in case you missed your opening to join in with him.

So, come a few weeks ago, Dr. Taylor was back at it: giving plenty of details on the Scripture, as well as the interesting tid-bits on the original Greek written language; but then, he brought in his down-to-earth examples as well (because, evidently, God's story is still on-going well after Paul penned his final letter). Dr. Taylor brought up an on-going story of a recent trend in

churches across this country, and will continue this Wednesday, in fact: it's called "Ashes to Go." Several years back, many pastors, including one of Dr. Taylor's former students, Pastor Aaron Layne, was trying to figure out how the church can better share the Good News with people beyond the walls of their respective congregation. "Ashes to Go" may seem incredibly sacrilegious to most of us die-hard Lutheran types, because it allows people to just do a quick drive through for ashes to be placed on their foreheads (as if they did all they need for their good deed to God, and just go on about their day) without doing the full-scale hour that is *obviously* necessary to be worthy of any of God's appreciation, and *obviously* needs to be done in a sanctuary, even in a non-Lutheran sanctuary, if they absolutely must.

Except, around five years ago, Pastor Aaron Layne was standing in the church parking lot during the late morning hours of Ash Wednesday, and about 70 cars in, came a father and son. The father was a Catholic, but the reason why they could not take part in any Ash Wednesday public worship, was because the son had stage four cancer and couldn't risk infection. Evidently, God's story is still on-going today: the father and son were able to share that somber, that sacred, that holy moment together. But come the next

Ash Wednesday, when, again, Pastor Aaron Layne was standing in his church parking lot, only the father showed up.

At that point in Dr. Taylor's story, in sharing that just as powerful of Good News as any he had translated from Paul, or written in whatever scholarly work, that Good News of an outlandishly grace-filled practice brought him to tears. Because part of Dr. Taylor's story, the part he loves more than all his work, even more than Nebraska football, is his family: his wife of over fifty years, his children, his grandchildren. And to imagine that God's love can reach them absolutely anywhere, even in a parking lot, just took him over the spiritual mountaintop.

So, word's out: evidently, it's okay to talk about it now. Jesus said it would be. It doesn't have to be a theological treatise. We don't have to convince people one way or the other about God. Our story is more than good enough, because there's just as much God fully active on the ground level of our human story as there is on any mountaintop. There are absolutely no limits to where this Great News will come to life in Jesus Christ, our still Risen Savior and Lord. And for that, we most certainly give thanks to God, indeed!

Amen!