

I will be the first to admit that when I was growing up, I did not always envision the church building as a place to unleash all my emotions. Instead, I was expected to be on my best behavior, for starters: no running around in the sanctuary, no wearing hats inside the building at all, no unnecessary noise whatsoever. Yes, it was ingrained into me that it was *God's* house, but, not even that; it was the mighty, all-powerful, even heavenly-intimidating *God's* house. So, in other words, “just don't take the chance on messing with the Almighty!”

It wasn't until a larger than life figure, both physically, to be honest, and spiritually-speaking, came into my life, named Denny Krock, that God became a little more accessible, a little more okay with our, including my, humanity. Denny was our youth-group director, but, also, a living embodiment of a fun-loving, playful, compassionate Jesus Christ. There was a different feel going into that church building from there on out. It may still have been God's house in a way (I didn't quite break that theology altogether), but the house was more hospitable than ever before, as if I could be *me* in God's house.

Denny pulled off that pivotal miracle for me in the conversations we would have as a group, making us feel like we were in one of our own living

rooms, and using the church building as the starting point to go out and get Christmas gifts for families in need, to bring a little more joy to other homes in the area; as if God could be just as much in that family's residence as any church building. Safe to say, Denny had me rethink the whole God thing, what God was open to, including inside God's own house, but I still wasn't quite there in being able to unleash all the emotions in that holy residence. I still had to be strong. Anything less would appear weak in God's eyes, this mighty God in Jesus Christ, who had taken on death itself and reigned victorious on the eternal scale!

And then came a dreary day when I was on internship in Dallas, Texas, a path to ministry that Denny most certainly played a role in laying a stubborn foundation for years earlier. Except, on that day, a call came from my mom, who worked at the high school where Denny, also, served as the custodian and the advisor to the Leo Club. I could hear it in her voice before she said anything. Denny had died after a long bout with brain cancer. I hadn't left my apartment yet that morning, but I was still convinced I had to be strong for him, for the church he proudly served. I had to go into the office. I had to lead Confirmation that night.

Except, once I finished with the youth, who were about the same age as I was when Denny started to shift my ideas about God around; at that time, my internship advisor, Pastor Bill, must have noticed something was up. I wasn't acting quite the same. So, he asked me to meet him in his office afterwards. I figured it was about the upcoming weekend worship services, but no: he knew. He gave me an opening, and I unleashed an outpouring of emotions that I never thought was allowed in the almighty, all-powerful, death-defeating God's house. I broke down. I was weak, but Pastor Bill offered a prayer that reassured me that God was as much with me then as God ever was before, and God was most certainly with an infectious-enthusiasm precious child of God, who no longer had any life left to give.

So, the Psalmist could not be more right this morning: "While I held my tongue, my bones withered away." We must always be careful when we operate ministry in God's house, lest we give off the impression that "you better act a certain way, you better maintain your composure, you better be strong and resilient; otherwise this God is going to leave you behind to fend for yourself." We run into such trouble often with this season of Lent: that we better improve our sin-record during these forty days, lest God gets furious over us. We better not eat these certain foods, we better not do this or do that;

otherwise, God's love for us is most certainly going to be affected. Then, of course, when we feel as if we do fall short, we'd rather not talk about it. We, obviously, cannot talk to God about our weakness, our basic humanity. We must not disappoint this mighty God, all while not even our bones wither away but the fabric our very soul.

However, the Gospel proclamation remains just as true during this season of Lent as it does throughout the entire church calendar year and throughout our entire life, for that matter. We have said it before, but it most certainly bears repeating: there is nothing you can do during these forty days or all the days the rest of your life that is going to make God love you more than God already does. It is not possible whatsoever for this God to cherish you more. And there is nothing you can say to this God to make God not be willing to take up the cross for you all over again. That, in this house, in God's house, you are welcomed here just as you are with all your imperfections galore; for you have been and always will be a most precious child of God, no matter what. And for that Greatest News of all, we most certainly give thanks to God, indeed! Amen!