



A significant chunk of high school homework for me involved reading through rather lengthy books. It all started freshman year with *Lord of the Flies* by William Golding. That wasn't much of a page-turner for me, at least. Then, there was John Steinbeck's *Of Mice and Men*. That one had its moments. Also, came F. Scott Fitzgerald's *The Great Gatsby*. That was more interesting. But English class went to another level that I was not so prepared for with a book called *Night* by Elie Wiesel. We had learned some of the general points about the Holocaust in history class, of course, but it was not nearly the same as reading through a story of someone who actually lived it.

For as old as I was in high school at the time, that was about the same age for Wiesel when he and his family were deported to the concentration camp. His mother and younger sister suffered through the most horrifying pain at their death. His father perished more gradually from starvation. Somehow, Wiesel survived long enough to see Allied forces liberate Buchenwald, and he eventually made it to Paris, where he began his most distinguished career as a writer that included the Nobel Prize. However, it would take more than a decade before he ever composed anything about his and his family's most terrifying nightmare.

Originally published in French back in 1958, the book *Night* was by no means easy for a teenager to read, a young naïve me who was used to sifting through the pages of *Lord of the Flies* and *Of Mice and Men* and *The Great Gatsby*. *Night* was so sad and disturbing that I have never opened it up again. And yet, twenty or so years later, the words continue to stick with me. I do not remember much about what was said in U.S. and World History classes, but I do remember Elie Wiesel, and I cannot help but think of him whenever certain parts of Scripture come up in our public worship or Bible study discussions or personal devotions.

Quite honestly, as sad and disturbing as Wiesel's first-hand account was, it is just as sad and disturbing how many Christians have manipulated certain parts of Scripture to support the most disgusting hatred and violence against our Jewish neighbors and any group of people we deem different from supposedly perfect us. I worry about the verse we heard this morning that has been used along with many others to unleash the most embarrassing behavior of our humanity: the verse that says, "you killed the Author of Life" (Acts 3:15). Evidently, such words from thousands of years ago, made it more than satisfactory to attempt to wipe out any descendants of Israelites, and still makes it okay for so many Christians to continue with the most reprehensible words and actions against our Jewish neighbors.

It's all so sad, so disturbing, but every once in a while, we must raise our collective awareness of such realities done in the name of the Lord of life, of peace, of infinite love. In a few months, it will mark five years since the death of Elie Wiesel. Unfortunately, more of the survivors are gradually fading away. And it must be our united responsibility that their stories continue to be told. That their witness must be shared, including the one line from Wiesel's *Night* that I hope to never forget. Wiesel wrote, "I heard the...man asking: 'For God's sake, where is God?' And from within me, I heard a voice answer: 'Where He is? This is where -hanging here from this gallows.'" No matter how sad, no matter how disturbing, there remains incredible power and the most mind-boggling hope from the people who lived through it all.

As far as I know, I did not grow up around anyone of the Jewish faith. There were no synagogues around my hometown, to say the least. But when I got to seminary, to a part of Columbus, Ohio, that was heavily populated by Jewish Americans; one Sabbath, some of us students went to a Reformed synagogue, and we were welcomed with open arms. We were treated with the most loving care and extensive hospitality, as if such basic human respect and heartfelt dignity is truly meant for all children of God, regardless of religion, age, ethnicity, or anything else we have come up with over history to arrogantly try to make one group of people better than another.

Those stories need to be shared, too, for sure. Except, the beauty of the Resurrection is about setting us free to create new stories of the most loving care, to convince others that God loves them so incredibly much, that there will be absolutely nothing that humanity can do to take away that same God from sticking it out with them to the end and beyond. God calls us to do our part in being authors of life, ourselves: desperately needed authors of hope and compassion and joy. And the Greatest New of all, is that we have all the inspiration we need to work with from the One who came to life not for vengeance or hatred of any kind, but for a death-defying care beyond our wildest imagination: for us and for the whole world that God, for some reason, still so desperately loves. For that, and for those who continue to inspire such captivating hope among us, we most certainly give thanks to God, indeed! Amen!

*Image: Elie Wiesel at a news conference in Budapest, Hungary, in 2009 (Bela Szandelszky/AP)*