

Valentine's Day often comes down to that one aisle in the grocery store, trying to figure out if there is, in fact, that one elusive card amidst the hundreds that is perfectly worded for the one we have in mind (I'm not so sure I found such a one for Sarah this year, but minor detail). However, we are fully aware of many instances in this life when a card with just the right words did not exist; those times when we can fully understand Peter's predicament in the Transfiguration story this morning: not knowing what to say, or, blurting something out in the heat of the moment that didn't turn out to be what was needed to be heard by the one we attempted to comfort. Sometimes, we pastors are trained into believing that we have such perfect words to say through a sermon or a prayer or a precise Scripture passage up our mental sleeve to solve any problem that may arise in this life. And yet, sometimes, when we have no words to say, no just-right card from the store in our hands: those turn out to be the holiest moments of all.

I remember one such unexpected humbling encounter, because of a man named "Roger," who was on the first call committee that actually extended the call to me to serve as their pastor out of seminary. I had a few interviews before them, but I didn't do so well with those. Those instances felt so intimidating, as if I did not have the perfectly worded answers for the people on the other side of the table. "Roger," instead, was one of those gentle, easy-going, caring souls that made all the difference in the world in making me feel welcomed as I was so filled with nervousness and anxiety as the interviews came and went for months. And as I started my time with that congregation, "Roger" continued to be that gentle, easy-going, caring soul who always insisted to check in to see how things were going for me, and always asking about Sarah, too. He was one of those people who made me feel as if I did not always have to find the perfect words for every possible situation.

And then, one morning, it was a dense fog. "Roger" made the trek out in his golf cart to get his morning newspaper on the other side of the road. Unfortunately, "Roger" never came back to his wife inside the house. I still remember sitting around that kitchen table with his widow, one of his daughters, some of his grandchildren, emergency response and social service personnel coming in and out of the house, and...not having the words to say. This was not the time for the usual clichés we tend to turn to: "everything happens for a reason" and the like. It turns out that the silence has its own holy sound, and even the symphony of tears truly reveals the holy depth of awe-inspiring love for a gentle, easy-going, caring soul that no card or any wordsmith whatsoever can come remotely close to describing.

Nevertheless, we human beings are wired to believe that we must fix everything. Oddly enough, "Roger" was a tool-and-die maker, a profession that encourages a mindset that with so many things that come up in a home, with automobiles, in a church building; so much can be fixed with just the right tool if it is crafted with dedicated and precision-to-detail hands. And yet, what happened to "Roger" that most awful morning, could not be fixed with any tool he made, or even a random craft he shaped out in his pole barn for his grandchildren.

His family's sadness and despair that poured out from the depths of their soul could not be instantly healed, and that was more than okay. They were allowed to be sad. They were allowed to be frustrated and angry and even cursing in their heart to God. No words could match their emotions. No card could make them feel better right there and then, and that was more than okay; and not because a pastor gave them permission, but because God has a way of joining us on whatever path we choose to take from loss and despair, no matter how we feel, no matter the words we choose to speak or not speak at all.

Yes, the rest of us bystanders will still try to say something to fix everything, with no ill intention meant at all. We will have our Peter-like moments and completely misread the room,

and not realize the devastating emotional toll of the circumstances for the ones we care about. And yet, while there is incredible power in Jesus transforming before a few disciples, I like to think the greatest part of this Transfiguration story is that, even though Peter misreads the eternal moment, Jesus insists that imperfect, but precious, Peter still walk down the mountain with him. Because, our Lord is under the impression that Peter still has something to offer in ministry, still something to offer in the heartbreaking moments of life, still something to offer in proclaiming the God who will stick it out with us no matter what.

We may not always find the right words to say, and even when we do mess up, God will insist we keep following our Lord to the moments where love and compassion and grace will be needed, because not only in those times will we do our best to care for those we cherish; but in those holy encounters, we will see the encapsulation of the Gospel that insists nothing that can ever happen in this life, not even death, will ever separate us from God's love in Christ Jesus, our Lord. And for that Greatest News of all, we most certainly give thanks to God, indeed! Amen.