



There is a person who comes to mind when I think of that line from the Psalm: “pour out your hearts before [God]” (62:8b). He sat across from me for my first real big-kid interview. And I must admit I do not handle those interrogating-like situations all that well. I tend to get rather anxious and nervous, to say the least, losing any confidence I had going in and wondering if I will have the right words anywhere in my mind to answer whatever random questions might come up.

But here I was attempting to get a job as a summer camp counselor, only months after I decided seminary was the way to go after college. It did not help that I got off to a rocky start before the interview even started, as one of the associates started asking me in an aside conversation if I had been to that camp when I was younger. I knew I had, but I couldn’t remember exactly when or why at that particular moment. I was too focused on the other potential random questions that might come up in the next several minutes. And so, the nerves and the anxiety swiftly invaded my whole being, building up to a near-breaking point before I even had a chance to start. I could feel the ensuing epic collapse within me.

Then, came the actual interviewer. It was weird, though. He did not sit behind his desk. He sat off to the side of it, like he was already comfortable around me before even knowing my quirky awkward self. As he carried on the seemingly casual conversation, and not the formal intimidation session I expected, I felt those anxious feelings gradually slipping away. He had this calming way about him, making you feel as if you were worth being in that room, you were worth having that conversation with, you were special in whatever even anxiety-ridden way you carried yourself. And I think back to that very moment, to that guy sitting beside his desk, and how ministry is often about helping others find their own way to pour their heart out before God.

The church camp setting turns out to be a perfect spot for such ministry to come to life, because there are young people of all different kinds there, not just in terms of sizes and hometowns and socio-economic backgrounds. There are also youth who are the clap-their-hands-with-the-music types, others who would prefer to sway back-and-forth, and some who would much rather not move at all. Some are more than comfortable leading a prayer in front of the entire camp, and some come with nerves and anxieties built up to the point they struggle to utter a single word to anyone outside their own family. The guy beside the desk (Jim was his name): he very well knew not only that every child would have their own way of pouring their heart out before God, and that some wouldn’t have the confidence to do so at all just yet, and that was okay; but Jim also knew that every young person, no matter how different they were from the rest, each one of them was still thoroughly cherished by God. That same God who poured out the divine heart in Jesus Christ for us all no matter our unique oddities and idiosyncrasies.

Jim himself was and is not the wave-your-hands and shout, “Hallelujah!” kind of Christian. He isn’t the speaking-in-tongues gregarious type. Yes, some of our siblings in Christ firmly believe that is how you *truly* pour your heart out before God. But we all know not all of us are wired that way, and God loves us just the same. Jim was wired with the public-speaking leadership gifts to lead a prayer in front of all the campers and us camp-counselors, and also to lead a song even if he didn’t have the greatest singing voice around. He did his best to pour out his heart before God, and before all of us to help us feel the very loving heart of God for us all,

regardless of our self-confidence level or wondering just how much God truly cared about us that day.

However, his best moments, the encapsulation of Jim's ministry, his most awe-inspiring pour-out-his-precious-heart-before-God times, was when he sat beside his desk, when he pulled up a chair to talk to a camper in the dining hall, and made them feel as if no matter how different they were, no matter what their relationship with God looked like, regardless of how much they could read the Bible aloud or pray with somebody else; Jim made them feel as if they were just as much a most beautiful child of God as anyone else in that whole camp, as anyone else in the entire universe, with no doubts whatsoever.

I envision Jim being like the prototypical pastor in the pre-COVID days, when he would stand at the back of the rugged outdoor sanctuary, greeting people as they left from the final worship of the respective week's stay. Most pastors tend to ask, "How are you? How are things goin'?" or the like. And most pastors tend to get the bare minimum, "Just fine...good." responses in order to keep the line moving and get to the next meal for the day, of course. Instead, in those sacred departure moments, so many campers poured their hearts out before him, as if they finally found the place and the people who made them feel cherished to their core, no matter how different they were in comparison to the rest.

And yes, *we* are different, too, in our own unique oddities and idiosyncrasies, to say the least. We all have our different ways of pouring our heart out before God: from praying to music to reading to writing to the small talk that turns out to be not so small at all. But, hopefully, in whatever way we do find ourselves comfortable in pouring out what we have to give in glorifying God and serving our neighbors; we never forget that God's very own heart was and continues to be poured out into our life each and every day, with no doubts whatsoever, through Jesus Christ, our still-Risen Savior and Lord, now and forevermore. And for that Greatest News of all, we most certainly give thanks to God, indeed! Amen!