



One of my seminary professors would often talk about a time in his life when he struggled immensely with faith, trying to figure out this whole God thing. It happened when he went with his family to an Ohio State football game at the beloved stadium in Columbus that fans refer to as the Horseshoe. Last year, that cherished sports venue turned 100 years of age and is now in the National Registry of Historic Places. Over the decades, the capacity grew to over 100,000 people, making it one of the largest in the entire country. And yet, it was there that my professor had his own sort of awe-struck experience as the disciples did with the Ascension, when they couldn't help but stare into the heavens.

So, on that football Saturday afternoon in Columbus, my professor, who was a teenager at the time, couldn't help but stare up into the C-deck, to the very top edges of the scarlet and gray sea of humanity, and further look up into the heavens. He wondered, "How could God possibly be with all these people at once? How could Jesus Christ be up in those heavens and still have an intimate loving relationship with all these children of God? How can all these people and all those countless many beyond the edges of that stadium be known and cherished by this Almighty God?"

Now, as the adored Horseshoe turned a century old, and Ohio State fanatics were craving a possible national championship run that season, something else was going on in the field of play, and even more so on the overlooked sidelines. One of the players was going through his own sort of Ascension of Christ struggle, wondering if God could possibly care about him. It wasn't just that he played on the offensive line, the ones who are often not talked about whatsoever unless something goes wrong, of course. But it was much more to it than that, as if he was staring up into the heavens and wondering about his place in the grand scheme of the whole world.

Soon enough, Harry Miller became a nationally recognized face speaking about the immensely important issue of mental health, one that most people are still not overly comfortable talking about for a variety of reasons. However, for Harry, an incredibly skilled athlete, not to mention a most gifted student, and a dedicated servant in the community, he still endured his fair share of heart-wrenching pain to the point of wondering about taking his own life. Soon enough, he went to social media, not to show off his blocking prowess on the football field, but to provide a face to a national and worldwide human issue. He wrote:

*At the time, I would rather be dead than a coward. I'd rather be nothing at all, than have to explain everything that was wrong. I was planning on being reduced to my initials on a sticker on a back of a helmet. I had seen people seek help before. I had seen the age-old adage of how our generation was softening by the second, but I can tell you my skin was tough. It had to be...And I saw how easy it was for people to dismiss others by talking about how they were just a dumb, college kid who didn't know anything. But luckily, I am a student in the College of Engineering, and I have a 4.0 and whatever accolades you might require, so maybe if somebody's hurt can be taken seriously for once, it can be mine. And*

*maybe I can vouch for all the other people who hurt but are not taken seriously because, for some reason, pain must have pre-requisites.*

*A person like me, who supposedly has the entire world in front of them, can be fully prepared to give up the world entire[ly]. This is not an issue reserved for the far and away. It is in our homes. It is in our conversations. It is in the people we love.*

*I am not angry. I had to lose my anger because I did not know if [God] would forgive me if I went to [God] in anger. I did not know how the Host of Hosts would respond to my untimely arrival, and I did not want to tempt [God]. So, in my sadness, I love my anger and learned many things...I learned...the type of love that can only be pieced together by the mechanism of brutal sadness.*

*And so, I will love more than I can be hated or laughed at, for I know the people who are sneering need most the love that I was looking for. The cost of apathy is life, but the price of life is as small as an act of kindness. I am a life preserved by the kindness that was offered to me by others when I could not produce kindness for myself.*

For far too many children of God, they stare up to the heavens, wondering if such an almighty God can care for measly 'ole them. But on this Ascension Sunday, and every day, the church boldly proclaims that even if Christ ascended to heavens, he insists on staying down here too. He insists that you do not have to look up to the heavens to find God. For God continues to walk among us in Jesus Christ, through the Holy Spirit forever churning on all love-filled cylinders within us, and through others who may be struggling just as much, but are not quite willing to talk about it just yet. At least, not until someone like Harry Miller, who, as a monstrous offensive lineman who played in front of over a hundred thousand on a Saturday afternoon and millions more watching on television; and, in spite of all that, he was willing to admit that something was wrong. That he wasn't so sure that God could care about still-small him in the grand scheme of countless many children of God.

And yet, Harry himself said, "God bless those who love. God bless those who weep. And God bless those who hurt and only know how to share their hurt by anger, for they are learning to love with me. I am okay. There is help, always." So, thanks be to God that on this Ascension Sunday, that help will always find a way to come from our Lord who still lives among us. For nothing can happen to separate us from God's love in Jesus Christ, our Risen Lord. So, for that Greatest News for Harry, for all of us, we most certainly give thanks to God, indeed! Amen!