

Can I vent? I need to vent.

As you might know, I grew up in New Jersey. There are many reasons to dislike New Jersey. Namely, being born into a life long's worth of sports disappointment, and traffic.

I don't know if I'd say I *enjoy* driving. It's a part of life. Some people can knock out an 8 to 10 hour road trip. And then there's me, I last around three, but be that as it may.

Now, while driving, I'd venture to guess that there's a common thought that has gone through all our minds. You're driving along, everything is going well, and then the sky gets dark. Rain starts. What are you supposed to do? Lights on. Wipers on!

It's been a few years since I took my test, but I'm pretty sure that hasn't changed.

There's something about inclement weather that makes people act irrationally. Have you ever noticed that everyone turns into a terrible driver when it rains? I'd need to ask Neil Degross Tyson for a scientific proof to this theory, but I think he'd find one.

Everyone turns into a bad driver in the rain, that is, except for me. And of course, that's what we all think.

For whatever reason people turn into the snail riding the turtle's back. Then there are those who don't put their lights making it hard for others to see them. There will be the inevitable fender bender pulled off on the side of the road. Rubbernecking. And there's always the random person pulled over on the side of the road.

What's that Carrie Underwood song?

Jesus, take the wheel?

Y'all know how much I hate platitudes, but *Jesus take the wheel?*

Ah, that's tempting.

That's what the disciples wanted. *Actually*, the disciples wanted Jesus to take the wheel, but they wanted to backseat drive.

You can't blame them. They've spent three years following Jesus. Everything and anything pointed to Him being the long-awaited Messiah. But now he must die; and the disciples don't understand why.

That's a valid question. But all things being the same, the real concern isn't so much His death but His absence. What are they going to do when He's gone? Our situation is different in degree but not kind.

We've all had moments like this, no?

A loved one dies. We're left with a hole. Say we get laid off. New job. Say your car gets totaled. That's never fun. Maybe you got issues at home. Everyone's got something. God knows. God knows that there are places in our lives that can be barren. There are areas in our lives, some more serious than others, where there's a void. Jesus' absence feels like one of those voids.

This void is simultaneously the wonderment and question of Easter. We believe that Jesus rose from the dead, yet we are left in the here and now, trying to figure things out, going day-to-day, hoping that gas prices will go down. What does Jesus fit into all that?

...Jesus take the wheel.

It's interesting. As Lutherans we don't ascribe to predestination. It's the idea that everything is already determined, and we have no control over what happens to us. No, we believe in free will, we make decisions for ourselves for good or for ill.

So, for example - I wake up in the morning and I put on my socks. Striped or Polka-dot? Is that the Holy Spirit? No, I can choose my socks.

We don't believe in predestination in the strictest sense. However, we do believe that there are three certainties in life. And I know what you're thinking - It's not life, death, and taxes - it's baptism resurrection and taxes. Of course, I'm making light. Yet there is something very

powerful in knowing that even in the void, we have a God who fits into our lives and offers us guidance.

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John 17 is one of my chapters in John's Gospel.

It's one of my favorites because it's one of a few places where Jesus prays. Jesus prays for the disciples.

So, to answer the disciple's yearning question, 'What are we going to do?', Jesus says, 'Well, you won't be alone. In fact, I will be with you.'

It's a churchy term, but it's not something reserved only for the religious world. Jesus says that he will *abide* with us. We all know the word - *abide*.

However, I do think that there is a difference between the secular and the religious use of the word. In a secular world "abide" is not always a good thing. In a secular world you *abide* by another person's rules. There is a *prerequisite* attached to the word.

In Scripture, to abide means that God is always present with us in all places and, and there is no prerequisite.

That brings me back to terrible drivers.

Again, we don't have to make a huge leap in thought to see how this applies to our lives.

The inclement weather are those times in our lives where we become uprooted.

We're driving along. Everything is fine. Then BAM. Tragedy. Loss. A void.

But here's the thing - when you're driving, there are things that keep you on the road. You turn on your lights, you put on your wipers, you trust the tread on your tires. For the Christian, these things amount to prayer.

We pray because Jesus prays for us. We pray because we trust that God, that Jesus abides with us in those troublesome times.

Here's why I really like John 17 - Jesus prays for those who will believe.

Did you hear it?

Grammar is important.

Those who *will* believe.

Us.

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I know Fred, you don't.

This time you really don't.

When he was dying of old age, I was summoned by his wife, Mae.

She asked if I would come over the farm, sit with her talk with Fred, and pray.

When I got to the house, she handed me a Lutheran prayer book in German. Fred, advanced in his illness was not particularly responsive and acknowledged my presence with a nod. I sat and opened the prayer book. As best I could I read the Lord's prayer in German.

That dying man mouthed the words and smiled.

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Prayer transcends our understanding.

It is God abiding with us. God being present.

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I served at a Level 1 Trauma center when I was earning my clinical hours. For those who don't know – Trauma 1 centers are the ones who get the worst cases.

I remember a late-night call I got on my beeper. It was a Hispanic family. I didn't, and still don't speak Spanish.

I can't describe it to you, but the picture is as clear in my head as you all are right now.

It was late at night, and I ran up to the ICU. There was a man who had been a terrible accident. You quickly learn that when people aren't in a hurry and family members are packed in a room - well it can be a bad sign.

It was in this case. The room was jam-packed with family members - all talking in their native tongue. Thankfully there was one relative who spoke English.

He asked if I would pray the Lord's Prayer. I said, "I would love to pray but I don't know if anyone's gonna be able to understand". So, he said, *what if you pray and I translate?* So that's what we did.

An entire room of family members and one stranger – me - holding hands sharing a bilingual prayer. A prayer that crossed language barriers, time, our understanding of the divine, name it.

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I can count on my hands the most powerful moments I've had the privilege of experiencing ministry, that was one of them.

You never know when the Holy Spirit is going to act. You never know when God is going to place a helper in your way. A helper who helps you proclaim the good news. And friends that is our role today and all days. We proclaim the good news.

Today, we do that through prayer.

Prayer doesn't need to be perfect. It doesn't need to be scripted. It doesn't need to be long. When prayer comes from a place of faith, that's all you need. Whenever you pray God is listening, in whatever way, God listens - and that's a promise.

We pray not because God already knows what's gonna happen, we pray because it's commanded. We pray because Jesus prayed and prays for us. And how powerful is a prayer that can cause a dying man to smile, and a room full of people unite as one?

So...Jesus take the wheel?

Well, maybe I'm changing my tune.

Maybe Jesus does take the wheel a little bit - more than a bit.

And if this is so, I believe that God steers us where we need to be steered. We are sent to unlikely places, encounter unlikely people, and act in Christ-like ways for others.

Yeah, I buy it.

So, friends, as we navigate our lives this week, this summer, when the storms of life rage, and when we feel alone and orphaned, know that Christ is with you.

Jesus abides with you, and we in him. This isn't some pay-to-play thing, there's no prerequisite. God, Jesus is always with us even, guiding, loving, forgiving, and sending us into the world.

Now if only he can make us better drivers.

Amen.