

-Abby's cousin, Luke, who lives in Davis, CA has this amazing pitbull/lab mix of a dog named Nina. Nina is wonderfully gentle yet playful. She'll come and sit at your feet, or run with you, or do really, whatever you ask. Nina is just an almost perfect best friend. Except for one thing: she loves taking things and burying them. Luke has an entire laundry list of lost items that he openly admits: "are probably buried deep out in the yard somewhere." "It's annoying," he continues, "especially when something like your favorite hat or even one of your nice shoes will just go missing and Nina will just look at you not wanting to give up the secret." This little habit of Nina hiding something for herself can only go so far. One time, when Luke came back to the house he noticed Nina acting very sheepish. He couldn't figure it out until he went into the backyard to gather some of their chicken's eggs and he counted the chickens to find one missing. Upon further investigation, he did find the missing chicken. Nina had gotten into the chicken pen and most likely started to play with this poor chicken. Turns out, a chicken as a play partner for a dog really isn't a good idea. Upon discovering her playmates' death, Nina decided to hide it and bury it, except she couldn't dig a hole deep enough to fit the chicken in. So, Luke found this chicken buried head first with its feet sticking straight into the air. So much for being innocent.

-It is easy to laugh at Nina's habit of hoarding things in the yard. It's harder to see that maybe this is human habit as well? As the saying goes: how well do YOU share with others? Sometimes, are you tempted to bury something in the backyard for yourself? I know I often do more often than I would like.

-During my internship, I attended the region wide ELCA Synod Assembly and went to a small presentation on pre-marriage counseling which was done by a psychologist. It was interesting as this psychologist was going through marriage trends and explaining that people of the millennial generation are trending later in life for many things: they are getting married later, buying a house later, and having kids later. He was describing the unique challenges to pastors who are doing pre-marriage counseling of couples who are getting married in their 30's or 40's. One of the big differences he took a lot of time in explaining to us in the room was the challenge for couples in their 30's-40's to share their logistical lifestyle with their partner. Unlike couples who are getting married in their early 20's and don't have more cemented careers, assets, or routines yet, engaged couples later in life have to leave more of their "single life" behind in order to create a healthy "life together". A lot of times, this psychologist explained, these couples run into buried items in the backyard that are hard to give up and which the pastor can help them uncover. Who thought it was THIS hard to share?

-I think Jesus' disciples also have some things kept close to the chest. John, one of the disciples, seems to be quite disturbed by this "imposter" who (as he says) was "casting out demons in your name, and we tried to stop him, because he was not following us." Turns out, it's a little hard to share Jesus for the disciples. Jesus is MY Jesus, not

YOUR Jesus. Infact, Jesus is so much *more* mine than yours that I'm going to go bury him in the backyard so no one else can see him and then stop others from mimicking him. Having this Jesus as a secret, ofcourse, makes me better than you. Sounds good right?

-I once, years ago when I was young, was playing a game of hide-and-seek with my brother and younger cousins. Jake, my cousin (whom many of you have met at Soren's baptism) was probably 4 years old and in charge of finding us. He had found everyone but my brother and was getting super frustrated. Well, it just so happened his older sister, Annie, had seen where Kevin was hiding and started to craftily bargain with a very frustrated, tears in the eyes, Jake. They went through all kinds of things: toys, TV time, play time, and even allowance as bargaining chips for Kevin's hiding spot. I can't exactly remember how it ended, but I'm sure my cousin Annie got a pretty good deal from it.

-Doesn't the church do this too? Here, we have a "special connection" to Jesus (definitely a more special connection than the Roman Catholics, Baptists, or Presbyterians), come over here and we'll share this with you...but you gotta join us first.

-What does it mean to live out "Whoever is not against us is for us"? In an age of "Jesus being MY personal Savior", this has become an incredible challenge.

-So how do we get beyond this challenge? Maybe it requires us to invite others we wouldn't expect to help us dig up our buried items.

-This week has been an incredibly difficult one for our country. I don't care who you are, watching the hearing with Christine Blasey Ford and Judge Brett Kavanaugh was incredibly painful. Whether you are a staunch conservative or progressive, I am willing to bet your reaction was similar: this event was extraordinary. What is replaying continually in my mind over and over again is the contrast of a calm, steady, courage of a woman who didn't really want to be there but who was compelled to tell her story with a male dominated, rageful, discontent. What I as a white male am struggling to comprehend is: is this an item buried in the backyard that has been found? For Jesus says: "If any of you put a stumbling block before one of these little ones who believe in me, it would be better for you if a great millstone were hung around your neck and you were thrown into the sea." Has a hierarchical society where maleness is more celebrated, (I want to include myself in this) and benefits by keeping pivotal rights and power to ourselves come out into the open? *You know, Christine Blasey Ford was authentic and probably truthful, but you know what: she was probably mistaken, or drunk herself, or part of some liberal co-conspiracy, so therefore we don't need to take her as seriously.*

-What does it mean as a church to say: this does not stand? Jesus does NOT mean something different for me than for you. Jesus as Savior of the world does NOT mean

that I get to hoard power and privilege at the expense of others. Male AND female are beautiful and equal partners in bringing the realm of God to all corners of our world.

-Maybe it means we as a church have to teach basic sharing again verses keeping something hidden in the backyard.

-Many of you know that I spent a year with the ELCA Young Adult in Global Mission program in London, England. Two weeks, into that year, my priest supervisor told me that he was leaving to take another call in Central America (he spoke fluent Spanish). His leaving put tremendous pressure on the two remaining priests who served four yoked congregations all about 1 mile apart. Because of such a shortage, I was doing things an international volunteer probably wouldn't do (preaching often and pastoral care). There was a church deacon (lay associate) in one of the congregations named Dorothy. Dorothy was an incredible person, being in her 70's and going back to seminary to learn theology. I could tell she had a desire to be a priest. The problem is that the particular congregation, St. Michael's (one of the 4 yoked churches), refused to allow women to be its priest. (this isn't a Church of England policy, but just for this particular congregation). Due to our staff shortage, however, this changed. During one of the daily masses, Dorothy was the only one available to do the service or preside at Holy Communion. St. Michael decided to change its congregation policy and give Dorothy permission to preside. Here was a person who had spent almost her entire life in this church, studying theology and serving others, nervously presiding for the first time. I was able to catch the moment where she gave the final blessing over the bread and wine. It was incredibly moving to see Dorothy in action. It was what she was meant for.

-Jesus is for me what Jesus is for you. May God grant us peace and understanding, and the ability to share the meaning of Christ with everyone. May God bless us in our time of lifting up those who have been oppressed and sharing with them in our hope of abundant life. Amen.