

The window panes of the classic yellow bus that we rode to school each day were divided in two. The lower section remained locked in place. The upper section slid up and down to allow for airflow on warmer days and, perhaps, a bit of hand-waving celebration on the last day of school or to greet friends walking by. The lower pane framed much of the world that I saw each day on the way to school. Introverted and quiet, I liked to watch the fields and forests flow by, see the deer bound across the recently harvested grain fields, follow the sunlight as it danced across the bay of Fishhook Lake, and spy classmates as they walked into school as we pulled up to disembark. The pane functioned as a portable movie screen for the world that passed by on a daily basis.

It is hard to tell what, precisely, the arc of the movie might be from day to day. The rhythm of life and the movement of the seasons was a constant. Time flowing on with no interest in, or care for, any of us on the bus, inexorably passing, washing over us, moment after moment after moment. Author Frederick Buechner wrote a wonderful book entitled *Telling the Truth: The Gospel as Tragedy, Comedy, and Fairy Tale*. Thinking back, the images from that window frame expressed not just a little bit of what Buechner recognized.

There was certainly tragedy if not downright horror at various moments. Hawks descended with stunning speed to destroy the clueless prairie dog. Or the dense northwoods forest would periodically reveal what was mostly hidden: rural poverty and squalor, as decrepit mobile homes and seemingly abandoned properties yielded youngsters to join the ride to school. Or the remnant of racial injustice in northern Minnesota--the Reservation--soberly reminded you that not everyone got an equal opportunity or a fighting chance. The inequities and injustices were a part of the truth, not a part of God's will mind you, but real. Indeed, these realities were experienced by Jesus in his own life. A reminder that as our own narratives play out, God is with us, even there.

Meanwhile, there were the occasional humorous histrionics of calves kicking up their heels in playful delight, or border collies moving a herd of sheep with the precision and skill of an artist. One could only giggle as the Johnson boy ran half-naked down his driveway--late again and mother chasing behind with his lunch pail--to catch the bus. And the goofy soundtrack to this cinematic craziness was the local blowhard radio host and the nationally syndicated radio theater production of *Chicken Man* played over the bus loudspeaker. A reminder as well that if the devil is in the details, well, then, perhaps God is in the humor that wisps in and out of our experiences.

The images drift through my mind, as if they were only yesterday. I can see the Vietnam veteran busdriver hiding his hangover or high under the aviator glasses framing his bearded face. I still wonder what he saw and experienced. I think about what he had hoped and dreamed for. I remember others on that bus, faces pressed up against the window pane, watching the world go by as well. In winter, they needed to breathe on the frosty window to peek out and see the

ongoing movie. On warmer days, they might fall asleep, their cheeks pressed up against the plexiglass. That little old bus rattling along as it bounced down the dirt roads of northern Minnesota to deposit youngsters in a schoolyard, picking them up at the end of the day, returning them home, and joining in the next morning to do it all again.

I think about those images from the window pane of that old school bus. I recognize the record repeats itself as I see younger faces on local Stamford buses viewing a different--yet similar--landscape and window-framed movie. What do they see? What do they think? What does it all mean?

One part Tragedy. Another part Comedy. And, in a wild way, all parts fairy tale. Which, finally, may be something to hold onto. The knight in shiny armor may not appear exactly when we need him (or her). The "happily ever after" may be only something that we glimpse now and again, rather than fully realize. Yet, as I have visited those near death, particularly nearer to death sooner than they thought, I am reminded that we should engage the various moments--whether tragic or comic--as if they are a part of the larger fairy tale that has God in the lead and moving us in a mysterious way more fully into God's love and being. If a school bus in northern Minnesota can be a vehicle carrying that promise, why not any other wild, goofy, and serendipitous moment of life?