

Who's gonna drive you home? (Psalm 31:1-5, 15-16; 1 Peter 2:2-10; John 14:1-14)

Jelly Roll's Grammy speech was a heartfelt testimony to the power of a relationship with Jesus.

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On a warm September night nearly a decade ago, I drove north to baptize my 29-year-old cousin on his deathbed. Collateral complications from opioid use. We had been messaging about the possibility of baptism in the weeks before he died. Five years later, his brother was felled by fentanyl. We had long been out of touch. And so, as for many Americans, the opioid crisis feels to me both near and far. The battle with this particular addiction has not entered my immediate household, but it is all around. We search for doors to understanding what is happening: through documentaries like *The Crime of the Century*, novels like *Demon Copperhead*, and music like Jelly Roll's Grammy-winning contemporary country album *Beautifully Broken*.

For those who want to understand the pain and yearning that any mis-used drug or drink is (at least temporarily) meeting, Jelly Roll opens up from his own experience. What's at the heart of addiction, spiritually and physically? An over-simplified answer might be: addressing pain. Seeking peace. Searching for our true home, the solace only abiding with God can give. He sings about getting "Higher than heaven ... when I'm hurtin' like hell ... No lost in my soul / No tears down my face / Yeah, up here alone / It all fades away." The pull of heavenly promises is obvious. On another track, he names the paradox of our deepest longings: "You want someone, but you want to be alone / And the drugs don't work no more / Who's gonna drive you home?"

In this same song, someone answers "I will, I will, I will." Who is this?

We might smugly or lazily read John 14 with our post-Easter glasses on: We know where Jesus is going (to heaven! Fully at home with God!), and we know the way (trust and follow Jesus!). Then Thomas in this story is just a foil, a dense sop, and it has nothing to say to us. But when I look around at some of the deepest pains of this world, I see the power and importance of Thomas's truth-telling: We have heard Jesus say, just as Thomas did, that he is going to live with God. Yet it seems we don't really know where this heavenly home is, or how to get there. Everyone's searching for the peace and beauty of this sacred communion, and we're driving down a lot of wrong roads.

In the end, it is Christ who will drive us home, and the path to the ultimate place we are all searching for (both in this life and beyond) at least begins with Jesus' simple encouragement: "Trust in God. Trust also in me."

Jelly Roll's Grammy acceptance speech was a heartfelt testimony to the power and possibility of this saving relationship, available to anyone. Yet those of us who already think of ourselves as part of the church might consider reading the passages from 1 Peter and Psalm 31 this week as a corporate challenge and goal: If we as congregations allow ourselves to be built into a spiritual house, and if we actually become the kind of communities where hurting bodies and souls can truly find refuge, safety, strength, guidance, and lovingkindness, then we will live into our name and call as the body of Christ. It's a tall order, but sometimes we all need someone to drive us home.

I lament to this day that my own kin didn't find a community to be their crag and stronghold in the wake of a chaotic childhood. I wonder to this day if the church is doing enough to extend a hand to those on the floor, for whom the drugs don't work no more.