

A truly groundbreaking trend has swept across the our nation over the past decade or so. In the past two years though, it has reached a peak, achieving that coveted status in the internet age of being considered a “viral” phenomenon. This trend is one effecting only our nation’s teenagers, primarily those in their junior and senior years of high school.

So what is this trend?

In what has come to be known as a “promposal” – a combination of the words prom and proposal – this trend involves teenagers inviting their love interests, whether they’re already dating or not, inviting them to prom in an extraordinarily elaborate fashion. Gone are the days when you would ask your boyfriend or girlfriend to prom with the spare and spartan verbiage: Will you go to prom with me? Ushered in is a new, far much more complicated era in which you must go to great lengths to express your desire to go to prom with someone.

A quick internet search will reveal several tried and true promposal techniques:

The far and away most used technique is simply to surprise your prospective date by gathering a group of friends to spell out your request across a number of handmade signs:

Another popular method involves accompanying your prom request with some food. Donuts, pizza, and, believe it or not, McDonald’s chicken nuggets seem to be the most popular food items. Nothing so plies the heart as empty calories:

Teens from more affluent households who are able to throw some cash at this project, can rent out billboards to make even bolder, more public gestures of their affection:

And, of course, there are always those unique few who forge their own paths. Like this young man who called in the coercing influence of an absurdly cute baby goat to ask his love interest to prom:

So this promposal business, as you can see, is a whole thing. It’s a cultural movement among our younger generations.

When this phenomenon first blipped on my radar, I, being the old spirit that I am, just kinda shook my head, and thought, “Man, these darn teenagers are making a big fuss out something that should be so simple. “ In my humble opinion, if you’re already dating someone, you should be able assume that they want to go to prom with you even if you don’t invest a lot of time, money, and energy in the asking. On the flip side of that, if you have to go to all that trouble just to convince someone to go with you to prom, you should probably be looking elsewhere for a prom date.

And yet, underneath all the excess and ridiculousness of this promposal trend, there seems to lie a truly genuine impulse. This impulse is one that says:

Even though I shouldn’t technically HAVE to do this;

Even though I don’t particularly NEED to do this;

Even though this is taking something actually quite mundane and making a really big deal out of it;

I am going to go ahead and make this big fuss because I need you to know HOW MUCH I want to go prom with you.

At the end of the day, that’s not an altogether bad sentiment to try to get across.

If we were to step back for just a moment; if we were take off our judginess caps for just a second, setting aside our concerns about these promposals being colossal wastes of resources; we might just recognize this underlying impulse as something familiar to us, as something we’ve seen at work elsewhere in our lives. In fact, if we thought long and hard about it we might even recognize this impulse as something we saw at work last week at our communion table.

The great Protestant Reformer Martin Luther maintained that believing the Gospel, in itself, isn't a hard thing to do. The hard part, Luther says, is believing that the Gospel is for you.

I believe that the sacraments – we celebrate just two in our church, communion and baptism – the sacraments were given to us by Jesus for exactly that reason: to convince us that the gospel really is for us. To put it in the words of today's reading from John, the sacraments convince us of and make real for us the fact that Christ abides in us and we in him.

How exactly do they do that?

Just like promposals, these sacraments take mundane things and transform them into something extraordinary to make the point perfectly clear to us.

In baptism, something as common as water – a thing that covers 71% of the Earth's surface – is taken, and blessed and used to signal nothing less than the death of our old selves and the birth of our new selves in Christ.

In communion, things as common as bread and wine – the everyday foods of Jesus' day – are taken, and blessed, and used to signal nothing less than our continuing participation in the Life and Body of Christ.

The impulse and logic at work in these rituals should at this point sound familiar to us. In both baptism and communion we hear said to us:

Even though I, the Almighty and All-powerful God,
shouldn't technically HAVE to do this;

Even though I, the Everpresent and Everliving Spirit,
don't particularly NEED to do this;

Even though this is taking something actually quite mundane – water, bread, wine – and making a really big deal out of it;

I, the God who already sent my Son to live and die in the world for your sake, am going to go ahead and make this big fuss because I need you to know HOW MUCH you are loved.

Friends, hear this good news.

It really is for you.

Amen.