

# TRYING SMALL

Brian Palmer – ELCA Pastor/Missionary serving in Totota, Liberia



Paul Goodings' Wake

## The Way Forward

I serve a tiny little rural church called Baysah Farm. It's a few miles off the coal tar on the road to Sanoyea. This gone week we had a big funeral. The man's name was Paul but everyone knew him as Doctor J. He was 41 and the word on the street is he was poisoned. Poisoning is both fairly common and dramatically overstated. The Liberian sense of propriety is quite different from the American sense. The casket was draped with Christmas lights and a blanket of fake flowers. The wake seemed to be endlessly interrupted with drunken family members wearing tee-shirts that had Doctor J's likeness printed on them. I, like everybody, found it all to be quite moving. The funeral couldn't be held at the Baysah Farm church; the crowd was huge and the church is not. The funeral was moved to St. John in Totota. At the funeral the extended family gathered around the casket and shared their thoughts and tears. One of Doctor J's nephews put his hands on the

foot of the casket and pleaded with his family. He wanted Doctor J's death to mark a transition within the family, a transition away from perpetual anger and fighting and toward reconciliation and peace. In the sermon I spoke about how God is in the reconciliation business and the idea of using a person's death to bring about reconciliation was in fact not a new idea.

After the funeral I spoke with the nephew and encouraged him in his efforts. What a great guy.

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I follow the news from the world but thankfully not too much. It is strange to me how divisive the world has become: Kyle Rittenhouse, Vaccine mandates, "Let's go Brandon" etc. have become the basis for claims of both personal righteousness and justified condemnation. I see people scrambling to news networks in search of fact-checked data and science they can use to demonize their neighbors instead of looking within. I'm thinking there must be a better way.