

Sharing God's Love

September 23, 2018

Our Savior's Way
Worshipping Sundays 8:00, 9:30, & 11:00 AM
Pastor Mann

Grace, mercy, and peace to you from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

The last time I wrote a sermon for you was the 26th of August the day my Dad died. That Sunday morning, Pastor Labuhn stood up here and read the sermon I had written while I sat in the pew. So this is really the first opportunity I have had to stand in front of you and talk to you since my life was turned sideways. I want to warn you, up front, that I am going to be very honest with you about what's been going on with me. Some of you know, on the last Saturday in August, my Father fell from his tractor, hit his head on the cement floor of the garage, was airlifted to Fairfax Hospital and, after a long night, died in the morning. Dad was 84. The next day, on Monday, my brother Eric, in Florida, was riding his motorcycle when he was hit by a drunk driver. He too was rushed to the hospital and, after a long night, he died in the morning. Eric was 59. They say bad things happen in threes. This week, Shirley Havener, one of the founding members of this congregation and a good friend for 25 years died peacefully in her sleep in the early hours of Thursday morning. Shirley was 91.

In the Amish and Mennonite communities down around Harrisonburg and up in Pennsylvania they say, "The best day of your life is not the day of your birth; it's the day of your death. Because that's the day you get to see Jesus face to face." Jesus rose in the morning—Easter morning. So every Easter we proclaim: "Christ is risen! He is risen indeed! Alleluia!" Because of Easter, I

don't have to dwell, this morning, on the sorrow that my family and others have experienced. St. Paul wrote: "No trial has overtaken you that is not faced by others. And God is faithful: He will not let you be tried beyond what you are able to bear, but with the trial will also provide a way out so that you may be able to endure it." (1 Corinthians 10:13) This is what I want to say to you this morning—I want to tell you how I have seen Jesus and experienced His love, most often through you, the people of Our Savior's Way.

Let's begin with the cards. A month ago I should have bought stock in Hallmark. These are just the cards that have come to my house. They don't include the cards that have come to my Mom and my two sisters. There is an irony in all of this. For the past two weeks, I know my wife Sally, who has been my rock and incredible support, has been secretly laughing at me because she knows that I've always disliked cards. Never-the-less, I have made it my mission to faithfully read through each and every card and say a prayer and blessing for those who sent it. And, I have to confess, I've gained a new respect for card writers and the beautiful poetry the cards contain and the personal messages that many of you have written. Through these cards, you have shared the love of God with me.

I'd like to read you one of the messages that I received. These words weren't written by a member of Our Savior's Way. They come all the way from California from someone I barely know. But this message touched my heart: "Dear Pastor Bill and Sally—It is with very heavy, sad hearts we hear of the loss of your father and brother—your father suddenly and your brother tragically and both at the same time. I don't know what to say other than God is with us, in the midst of trials and pain—always has been—always is—and always will be. My wife and I will continue to pray for your family as you go through this time of grief. And you can look forward to seeing your Dad and brother again someday."

St. Paul wrote: "Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of compassion and the God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our troubles so that we can comfort those in any

trouble with the comfort we ourselves have received from God.” (2 Corinthians 1:3-4) This is a powerful passage. Our God is a God of love and compassion. He comforts us in our troubles. And through the trials, we face in life he gives us a vocabulary, an empathy, a compassion that allows us to comfort one another.

There is another Bible verse that has been important to me. Psalm 34:18—“The Lord is close to the broken-hearted and saves those who are crushed in spirit.” It’s at times like these that God comes close and you experience His presence in an extraordinary way. At times like these, the light of His love shines through the words of Holy Scripture. The Words of the Bible take on new meanings and God speaks clearly. Thank you to everyone who shared with me a Bible verse or promise. They have been incredibly meaningful. And if all you sent was a card with your name at the bottom or if you didn’t even send a card. It doesn’t matter. God uses us all in different ways to share His love—some of us are card-senders and some of us are not. But through your prayers and thoughts for our family—we have felt your love.

Now, we come to the theme for this week—“Sharing God’s Love.” You have done that! Remember the mission statement? Let’s read it together: “At Our Savior’s Way, we glorify God and make disciples for Jesus by: Forming Relationships, Experiencing Jesus Together, and Sharing God’s love.” I think we all know that growing in our faith takes time—it takes a whole lifetime. What we know, less well, is that sharing God’s love and growing in faith also takes the love and support of our brothers and sisters in Christ. It’s something that happens in a community. This process of growth and sharing God’s love is revealed in the many “one another” statements in the New Testament: Love one another; forgive one another; teach one another; correct one another; encourage one another; pray for one another; bear one another’s burdens; be friends with one another; serve one another; submit to one another out of reverence for Christ. This list just scratches the surface, but it is enough to make clear that when we live as God wants us to live—we share His love and experience the presence of Jesus and grow in our faith. I thank you for sharing God’s love with me and for letting me see Jesus in you.

John called Jesus “The Light of the World.” I believe we as Christians are at our best when we reflect Jesus’ light and let His love shine in our world.