

Farewell

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Our Savior's Way Lutheran Church

Pastor Mann

There's a story about a guy who tried to show his skill by walking on a tightrope stretched across Niagara Falls. On the big day, a huge crowd gathered. The man silenced the crowd and asked, *"How many have the faith that I can walk this tightrope?"* The crowd cheered him on, and when he made it to the other side they cheered some more. He silenced the crowd and asked, *"How many have the faith that I can do it blindfolded?"* The crowd cheered him on, and when he made it to the other side they cheered some more. He silenced the crowd, looked around and saw a wheelbarrow. *"How many have the faith that I can do it blindfolded and carrying a wheelbarrow over my head?"* Again the crowd cheered him on, and when he made it to the other side they cheered some more. He silenced the crowd and said, *"I want to thank you for the enormous amount of faith you have shown in me, but I'm not finished yet! How many believe that I can walk this tightrope blindfolded, carrying this wheelbarrow over my head ... with someone in it?"* The crowd began to cheer him on, but then he interrupted them and asked, *"May I have a volunteer?"*

I can only say that at the end of 25 years of ministry at Our Savior's Way—I can only look back and say, "This has been an awesome wheelbarrow ride!" Sally and I jumped into the wheelbarrow when we felt God's Spirit leading us here to Northern Virginia. We left a church in Wisconsin to come and start a church at Broad Run High School. A lot has changed in the last 25 years and it's been an awesome ride! Thank you for that. There are so many of you that I need to thank but there is one person I need to say "Thank you" to above all others—and that's my wife. When I told her that I thought we needed to move to Loudoun County, she absolutely bowled me over when she said, "You're right." And so, we came and with God's help and the help of the Southeastern District we started Our Savior's Way.

You know, it takes a load of faith to ride in a wheelbarrow. Wheelbarrows are not the most stable transportation devices. If the wheel in the front hits a bump, then the whole thing tips over. That's happened a few times. The first time was when someone thought it was a good idea that the church should raise some money by selling Christmas trees. Snicker's Gap Tree Farm gave us the trees for free. We couldn't lose, right? The trees arrived on a flatbed truck—700 of them—white pine—about 8-15 feet tall. We went to work;

offered free delivery; cut them down to size; sold about half the trees. But, what do you do with 350 Christmas trees on the day after Christmas? You borrow a box truck and load up trees so you can dispose of them the next day. Then, during the night, you get one of those beautiful Virginia winter rains and the field where the truck is parked turns to red muck and the truck gets stuck, up to the axle and you have to call a tow truck. But it can't be an ordinary tow truck because the box truck is loaded with 350 Christmas trees and they are heavy and it's stuck in the middle of a field up to the axle in red Virginia clay and you need a 100-foot chain just to hook onto the tow truck. There are a lot of stories like that, where the wheelbarrow just tipped over. But somehow, by God's grace, and with the help of faithful brothers and sisters in Christ, you get the wheelbarrow right-side up again and working together you get moving.

Today, I think about Paul's final words to the church in Corinth, ***"Finally brothers, be of good comfort, be of one mind, live in peace, and the God of love and peace will be with you."*** (2 Corinthians 13:11) We depend on one another. We need one another. I remember in the early days, one of our members—he was the vice-president of the congregation—he would say to me, "Pastor, we need to get the offering up so we can close this childcare center." And I would just smile and shake my head. At Our Savior's Way we stand together—church and childcare center; old and young; immigrant and native-born; traditional and contemporary; dogs and cats (well, not cats). That's why I believe Our Savior's Way is just like the Church at Corinth. It's a gifted church. It's a church with strong leaders. It's a place where the Spirit is moving and people are creative—full of ideas, and God has given us the resources to carry out His ministry. And that's the challenge, isn't it?—Strong leaders, unlimited resources. But we wonder—how will we do it? And what will the future bring? And how long will it take? But our God is greater than our questioning fears and He calls us to be more than what we are. We become God's people together. Jesus said, ***"Wherever two or three are gathered in my name, there am I with them."*** (Matthew 18:20) Did you know there are 51 "One Another" statements in the New Testament—accept one another, serve one another, bear one another's burdens, forgive one another. But one statement appears more times than all the rest. We hear it from Peter, and Paul, and John, and also from the lips of Jesus himself. It is the greatest of the "one another" commands. What is it?—simply this: ***"Love one another."*** (1 John 3:11)

This love that Jesus is talking about is not just a word. It's a transformational kind of love—a love that makes us want to be better people and it brings out the best in us and in one another. Perhaps you have experienced that kind of love when a spouse or co-worker or friend made you want to be a better you or made you realize that you are capable than more than you ever imagined. If

so, you have experienced the love of Jesus through another person. I have received this gift from you. We can give and receive this gift of love because Jesus has changed us. His death and burial and resurrection has given us new life. When you accept His offer of salvation, your identity changes from sinner to saved, from enemy to friend, from lost wanderer to child of God. His love is life-changing and once you've experienced Jesus' love you want to share it with others. Max Lucado gives this illustration about seagulls and geese. It describes the importance of "one another" and the kind of church we want to be.

In the Gospel for today, Jesus is 12 years old. Maybe you know the story—Mary and Joseph take Jesus down to Jerusalem to celebrate the Passover. They are with their extended family, aunts and uncles and cousins. After a week of Passover festivities, they start for home. But somehow, in the confusion, Jesus gets left behind. It is 24 hours before his parents realize he is missing. They search frantically among the relatives—***"Have you seen Jesus?"*** Finally, there's nothing else that these worried parents can do. They retrace their steps, go back to Jerusalem and look for Jesus in the last place they saw him—in the temple. And that is where they find him—three days later!—***"sitting among the teachers, listening to them and asking them questions."*** His parents are upset, ***"Where have you been?"*** they demand. Jesus answers, ***"Don't you know that I would be in my Father's house and that I must be about my Father's business?"*** In the months to come I encourage you to ask yourself these questions: 1) Have I been spending the time I need in my Father's house? And 2) Have I been about my Father's business? (Is it all about me, or God?)

I read a story recently about the president of a large company calling an employee into his office for a talk. *"Rob,"* he said, *"you've been with this company for a relatively short time. You started out in the mailroom and a month later you were promoted to a sales position. Six months after that you were promoted to District Manager and six months after that you were promoted to Vice-President of Sales and Marketing. After one year you made Executive Vice-President. Now, it's time for me to retire, and I want you to take over the company. What do you say to that?"* Rob replies, *"Thanks."* *"Thanks?!!! Is that all you can say—Thanks?!!!"* Rob replied, *"I guess not. Thanks, Dad."* 25 years. It seems like such a short time, but so much good has happened here! And so much good has still to happen. You and I, we have been given—for a time—this great gift and opportunity to make a difference—for Jesus and for God our heavenly Father. So, grab that wheelbarrow, lift it up and push it forward together—love one another, encourage one another, forgive one another, bear one another's burdens—and so fulfill the law of Christ.

Service Notes: Farewell

1. When is a time when you have had to step out in faith and take a risk?
2. As you think about Our Savior's Way (whether your time here has been long or short) what stands out to you as particularly significant?
3. When have you felt like the "wheelbarrow" of your life was upset? How did you handle it? Are you more likely to ask for help when you need it or try to go it alone?

"Finally, brothers, be of good comfort, be of one mind, live in peace, and the God of love and peace will be with you." —2 Corinthians 13:11

4. What is Paul asking for when he says:
 - a. "Be of GOOD COMFORT" _____
 - b. "Be of ONE MIND" _____
 - c. "Live in PEACE" _____
5. How is it possible for a Christian church—full of all kinds of people who are full of creative ideas—to be of "One Mind?"
6. Why is Jesus' command to "Love one another" the greatest of the "one another" commands?
7. What does it mean that "The love Jesus is talking about is a transformation kind of love?"
8. What was the lesson of the "Seagulls and Geese?"
9. What did Jesus mean when he said, "I must be about my Father's business?"
10. How do you feel when you consider that God is your Father? What is the business that God wants you to be about?
11. What do you need to do to make that happen this week?