

Stories from Germany and Greece: Good morning everyone, my name is Mark and I'm one of the pastors here at North Shore Alliance Church. Before I preach this morning I wanted to take some time to share a few stories from the recent trip that Pastor Dave and I took to Germany and Greece.

As many of you know, our church has partnered with Ralph and Ruth Shareski as they have planted churches in Germany over the last 25 years. This July they will be leaving Germany to spend 18 months working in Canada before they retire. Dave and I had the opportunity to stay with Ralph and Ruth, visit the churches they have planted, and spend time with a number of their leaders.

Currently the Shareski's live in the city of Heidelberg, famous for its university, which was founded in 1386. It's a city of 150,000 people with up to a third of population composed of university students. Close to Heidelberg, in a city called Worms, Martin Luther was put on trial because of his commitment to teaching and preaching the Bible. While Germany is a country with a rich Christian history, what remains are beautiful cathedrals—relics of the past—that speak of what once was.

But in the middle of Heidelberg Ralph and Ruth have planted a church that is called *New Song*. The name of their church comes from Psalm 40:3 which says, "*He put a new song in my mouth, a hymn of praise to our God. Many will see and fear the Lord and put their trust in him.*"

While we were with the Shareski's, Dave and I had the opportunity to visit with Timothy; Timothy came to Heidelberg from Nigeria to study at the university. He told us his story of loneliness, emptiness,

and depression; he eventually decided that he had nothing to live for and he planned to take his own life.

But last year, he was walking through the old part of the city, intent on going to a pub to watch the World Cup, when someone from *New Song* called out to him from the street. He slowed down and a young woman approached him with an invitation. *New Song* was having a church service that night, Timothy could hear the music wafting from the church out into the street—she wondered if he was interested in hearing about Jesus.

Timothy wasn't interested and he went on his way. But by the time he showed up at the soccer game, he heard an inner voice telling him that he should go back, go inside, and hear what they had to say. He listened to the voice; he went back and slipped inside the church; Ralph and Ruth were talking about Jesus. When they were finished, Timothy rushed to the front and said, "*I want to become a Christian!*" Timothy is now a core member of *New Song* and loves to tell others about the hope he has found in Jesus.

As Ralph and Ruth prepare to come home, they are transitioning their leadership to a team they've developed, beginning with Karissa—a young Alliance missionary who has been with them for the last few years. Karissa is a gifted leader and shepherd with a passion for mission and evangelism; Dave and I were able to spend significant time with both Karissa and Lewis—praying for them, encouraging them, talking about the future.

After spending 4 days with the Shareski's and their leadership team, Dave and I had a quick overnight stop over in Augsburg, before making our way to the Interwoven Conference in Greece.

What was in Augsburg? A Bundesliga football match between Augsburg FC and Bayern Munich; Dave turned 50 on the day we left for Germany and we thought that a football match was a fitting way to celebrate. Let's just say the experience was epic—exciting football and an incredible atmosphere; it was a wonderful evening.

The next morning we flew from Munich to Greece to attend a conference put on by our denomination that brought together pastors, International workers, and leaders from our National and District offices. Dave and I met with international workers who are ministering in places like Kurdistan, Tajikistan, Senegal, Cairo, and Niger.

Some of these workers are planting churches, others are working as teachers, doctors, and nurses in limited access nations; all of them are building relationships so that they can share Christ with people who have no access to hearing about Jesus. It was powerful hearing their stories! There are more people in the Islamic world responding to the gospel today than at any other time in the history of the world. It's not easy, but there is a harvest going on as people respond to the call to move out on mission.

Dave and I met with young men and women—young couples and their children—who have picked up their lives and moved to Senegal, Cairo, and the U.A.E; they are learning Arabic so that they can communicate the good news concerning Jesus. We also met with older couples in their mid 50's and 60's; people who had retired from their careers and sensed God's invitation to spend the next season of their life, on mission, in a different part of the world.

God loves the world, and so do we—it was such a privilege to see and hear about God's work through our Christian and Missionary Alliance family. As a church, we believe that mission exists across the street and around the world, and we are so grateful for your partnership.

Our leadership team at North Shore Alliance continues to ask God who will be the next wave of international workers; who among us will He call and send out? You might be in your early 20's and just beginning to think about your vocation—perhaps God will send you? Perhaps you're a year or two away from retirement, but you're willing to consider spending the next chapter of your life on mission in another part of the world. If that's the case, please come and talk with Dave, Mardi, or I.

In just a moment I'm going to begin my sermon but first let me pray.

Eugene Peterson writes, "It always comes as something of a shock that not everyone likes us just as we are. We enter the world, most of us anyway, cuddled and loved... We're so *lovable*! And so loved. But it doesn't last long."¹

There is one particular truth that is fundamental to all of existence: *God loves the world*. Why did God create anything? Did He create out of boredom or loneliness? No, all of creation is the overflow of His love, for the impulse of love is always outwards, to the other, for the sake of others.

¹ Eugene Peterson, *Leap Over A Wall: Earthy Spirituality For Everyday Christians*, 47.

God is loving because He *is* love. Peterson writes, “‘*God so loved the world that He gave*’ is the basic text for understanding and interpreting everything that happens in and around us.”² But while the love of God may be the fabric of our existence, the circumstances of our lives sometimes stand in stark contrast.

We are—at times—criticized, mocked, and excluded. We are the target of other people’s jealousy, bitterness, or rage. We are taken for granted, or rejected, or blamed. The list could be longer but I don’t want to elaborate. God loves us with an everlasting love, but not everyone shares God’s opinion of us; sooner or later, everyone encounters an enemy.

illus: It was in Grade 5 that I had my first real run-in with an enemy—Tony Alcobia—but here’s the thing, I don’t know how it started. There was no rivalry between us, no argument I can recall, or unkind word; we had been in the same class in previous years without incident. All I know is that in Grade 5, Tony had it out for me.

Every chance he got he picked on me, using his height and weight advantage to push me around. On one particular day, the bell went off, signalling Recess. We all jumped up to grab our coats, our teacher left the classroom, and that’s when it happened. Tony grabbed me from behind, put me in a headlock, and begin to squeeze with all of his might. It was painful *and* humiliating; everyone saw it happen except for the teacher.

As everyone filed out of the classroom, I quickly devised a plan. I went back to my desk, took the lid off of my pen, and stuck it inside

my upper lip. If one were to take a quick glance at my face, it looked as though I had a fat lip—like someone had punched me.

I made a beeline for where the Grade 7 students hung out and found my older brother Scott. When you grow up with an older brother, they are bound to pick on you from time to time, but my older brother didn’t like it when other people picked on me. While I was always short and small, Scott was tall, big, and strong. Scott took one look at my lip and asked what had happened; I pointed across the field and uttered two words: *Tony Alcobia*.

Scott took off at a jog, and I raced after him. He grabbed Tony by his shirt, slammed him up against the fence, and cocked his fist. Before he levelled Tony, I begged Scott to show mercy. Scott decided to let Tony go, and Tony decided that he didn’t want to be my enemy anymore; it was a convenient arrangement for us all.

God loves us with an everlasting love, but not everyone shares God’s opinion of us; enemies dot the landscape of our experience. Last week, Pastor Mardi preached about David beginning his work in King Saul’s court. The irony is that the more good David did, the more success he found, the greater an enemy he made of King Saul.

As Mardi said, King Saul’s anger was rooted in jealousy; he was filled with a hatred that came from comparison and envy. As David won victories and the people began to praise him, Saul imagined that David was a threat to be eliminated. Chapters 18-20 describe Saul’s six different attempts to murder David.

² Peterson, 48.

But when we look closely at these same three chapters, we see God’s miraculous provision woven throughout; the miracle of friendship. David must have been intimidated, overwhelmed, and afraid in Saul’s court **but** he wasn’t alone—he had a friend who stood by him and shielded him from trouble.

This morning, we’re going to take a closer look at the friendship between David and Jonathan; we’re going to look at three different texts, I’m going to make some observations, and then talk about friendship in light of Jesus.

1. 1 Samuel 18:1-4. At this time I’d like to invite you to turn in your Bibles with me to 1 Samuel 18, beginning in verse 1.

“After David had finished talking with Saul, Jonathan became one in spirit with David, and he loved him as himself. 2 From that day Saul kept David with him and did not let him return home to his family. 3 And Jonathan made a covenant with David because he loved him as himself. 4 Jonathan took off the robe he was wearing and gave it to David, along with his tunic, and even his sword, his bow and his belt.”

This scene takes place after David fought and killed the Philistine champion, Goliath. From that time on, Saul took David into his service; he needed valiant warriors around him. And were told that right from the beginning, there was a deep friendship between David and Jonathan.

The NIV translation describes their friendship saying, *“they were one in spirit;”* the NRSV says, *“the soul of Jonathan was bound to the*

soul of David;” another translation describes them being *“bound in friendship”* to one another.

Genesis 1 tells us that over a six-day-period, God created the world and everything in it. If you read this account, you can’t help but notice a pattern; after each day of creation, God would admire what He had made and make the following pronouncement: *“It is good!”* Days 1 through 5 concludes with *“It is good,”* but part way through Day 6, we hear the first *“not good.”* It seems there was an expanse of time between the creation of first human being and the second—Adam before Eve, Adam without Eve.

Everything God had made was good, beautiful, and purposeful; everything exactly the way He wanted it to be. Think about it—there weren’t any barriers between God and Adam; their relationship wasn’t strained in any way, no fear, no misunderstanding, no barriers. In other words, everything was “perfect” when God uttered the words: *“It is not good”*.

In God’s own being as Father, Son, and Spirit, He experiences love and togetherness. He wanted this same experience for Adam and so He created Eve; *“It’s not good for man to be alone.”* This is meant to be more than a statement on marriage; more fundamentally, it’s a statement about the goodness and necessity of friendship. None of us is meant to live life alone; we’ve been made for relationship with God and one another—friendship is one of God’s greatest gifts.

illus: I want all of us to pause for a moment and call to mind a friendship that we have known and enjoyed. I’m going to give each of you a 60 second assignment, talk to someone beside you and as

briefly as possible, tell them the name of a friend, and, describe one way that this friend has been a gift to you. **Go.**

Vs. 3 says that Jonathan made a “covenant” with David. While the word “covenant” is a biblical word, it’s not an everyday word for most of us. It communicates “a vow, a promise, pact, or formal commitment”. We expect to hear covenant-words at a wedding—*for better for worse, for richer for poorer, in sickness and in health*—but we may not associate them with friendship.

Why then mention of covenant between David and Jonathan? Perhaps because there was so much on the line. We’re told in vs 4 that Jonathan gave a number of gifts to David: his robe, sword, bow, and belt. The gifts Jonathan gave were symbolic; they were king-making gifts. Jonathan was the crown Prince of Israel; by giving David his royal tunic, sword, and belt, he was declaring his commitment to David’s future kingship. *David, you’re the one who should be king, and I’ll stand with you and support you until it happens.*

Vs. 3 says that Jonathan loved David “*as himself*”. To love someone “as yourself” is to recognize their inherent value and worth, to seek their good, their interests, to show them honour, to rejoice when they are recognized or blessed. **It takes time—and truth—to be this kind of friend; it takes maturity and security to be this kind of friend.** It’s only as I live in the truth and experience of God’s love for me, that I can selflessly commit to seeking the prosperity of another. Envy and comparison are dangerous to our soul and the enemy of friendship; I am not diminished when another person advances.

Let me ask you this morning, *are you this kind of friend? Do we have these kind of friends?*

2. 1 Samuel 19:1-6. As I said earlier, this miracle of friendship was played out in the midst of murderous attempts on David’s life. Three times Saul tried to kill David with his spear, and twice he tried to have him killed by way of the Philistines. When these attempts failed, Saul asked Jonathan to do the deed for him. Reading now from 1 Samuel 19:1-6,

“Saul told his son Jonathan and all the attendants to kill David. But Jonathan had taken a great liking to David 2 and warned him, ‘My father Saul is looking for a chance to kill you. Be on your guard tomorrow morning; go into hiding and stay there. 3 I will go out and stand with my father in the field where you are. I’ll speak to him about you and will tell you what I find out.’

4 Jonathan spoke well of David to Saul his father and said to him, ‘Let not the king do wrong to his servant David; he has not wronged you, and what he has done has benefited you greatly. 5 He took his life in his hands when he killed the Philistine. The Lord won a great victory for all Israel, and you saw it and were glad. Why then would you do wrong to an innocent man like David by killing him for no reason?’ 6 Saul listened to Jonathan and took this oath: “As surely as the Lord lives, David will not be put to death.”

If you were born into a western culture, saying “no” to your father may be difficult, but still acceptable; for those born into an Eastern culture, saying “no” to one’s father is both difficult and unacceptable. Jonathan had nothing to gain by friendship with David’s, in fact, it

brought him into conflict with his father; in the text I've just read, we see that Jonathan was both a respectful son *and* a loyal friend.

Saul was scheming to eliminate David, and the King was used to getting what he wanted. He wanted David dead, he wanted Jonathan to make it happen, but under great pressure, Jonathan defended David's innocence. Proverbs 17:17 says, "*A friend loves at all times, and a brother is born for a time of adversity.*"

Eugene Peterson writes, "Jonathan's friendship was essential to David's life. It's highly unlikely that David could have persisted... without the friendship of Jonathan."³

We've all had moments when we've felt intimidated, overwhelmed, and afraid—at home, in school, at work, in a court room, or a doctor's office. But the presence of a good friend can strengthen us to endure, give us courage to stand, or offer much needed perspective. Again I ask, *are we these kind of friends? Do we have these kind of friends?*

3. 1 Samuel 20. Things settled between Saul and David for a brief time but before long Saul was throwing his spear at David and trying to manipulate others—this time his daughter (David's wife)—to take David out. In 1 Samuel 20, David went into hiding and Jonathan came to visit him.

This what Jonathan said, beginning in vs. 13, "*if my father intends to harm you, may the Lord deal with [me], be it ever so severely, if I do not let you know and send you away in peace. May the Lord be with*

you as he has been with my father. 14 But show me unfailing kindness like the Lord's kindness as long as I live, so that I may not be killed, 15 and do not ever cut off your kindness from my family—not even when the Lord has cut off every one of David's enemies from the face of the earth.'

16 So Jonathan made a covenant with the house of David, saying, 'May the Lord call David's enemies to account.' 17 And Jonathan had David reaffirm his oath out of love for him, because he loved him as he loved himself."

What makes this encounter so significant is that it signals the end of their active friendship; this is the last interaction they had. David became a fugitive—Israel's Most Wanted—and Jonathan resumed life in the palace. In the years that followed, Saul hunted David through Israel's wilderness, and presumably, at times, Jonathan was at his father's side.

But though he remained by Saul's side, Jonathan never stood against David—his kept his covenant friendship until the end of his life. And I believe that long after they were separated, the memory of their friendship strengthened and encouraged David all those years in the wilderness.

Perhaps the greatest miracle of this story is that Saul's fear and jealousy never infected Jonathan, or for that matter David—it was friendship protected them from Saul's cancer. Because of friendship, Jonathan let go of power and privilege, paving the way for David's

³ Peterson, 53.

kingship. Because of friendship, David showed mercy to Saul and his family, refusing to seek retribution.

Friendship is a gift from God; it has the power to encourage, strengthen, and inspire. My question for you this morning is *who is standing with you?*

Everywhere I look I find people who are withering for lack of friendship. We have colleagues or classmates, neighbours or acquaintances, but do we have friends that stand with us in difficulty. Do we have people who really know us—our strengths, frailties, hopes, and disappointments? Do we have people in our lives who see us at our worst and still believe the best about us? *A friend loves at all times and a brother is born for adversity.* Don't underestimate the power of friendship.

Application: Friendship shaped David and Jonathan and it provides a picture of how God has set His face towards us. Listen again to Jonathan's words in vs. 14, "*show me unfailing kindness like the Lord's kindness*".

The word "**covenant**" is used to describe the pact that Jonathan made with David. He entered into friendship committing to love, honour, and protect David. The Prince of Israel gave gifts to a poor shepherd boy, and in so doing sent a signal that he would lay down his own claim to the throne, that David might rise in his place.

This friendship is a picture that points to the greater friendship that God offers to us through the Lord Jesus Christ. John 3:16 tells that *God so loved the world that He gave His One and Only Son*; Jesus took on our flesh and blood, becoming human. In becoming human,

God the Son bound Himself to our sinful condition—He became what we are, that we might receive what is His.

In a much greater way than Jonathan, Jesus, the Prince of Heaven, laid aside His royal privilege to stand with us. Through Jesus we are offered a magnificent exchange:

- He became poor, that we might become rich (2 Cor. 8:9);
- He was bruised, that we might be healed (Is. 53:5);
- He became sin, so that in Him we might become the righteousness of God (2 Cor. 5:21).
- He descended to earth, that we might ascend to heaven (Jn. 1:14; 14:3).

All of this comes to light when we look to the cross. In John 15:13, Jesus said, "*Greater love has no one than this: to lay down one's life for one's friends.*" This is exactly what God did for us in Christ; at the cross, Jesus died for our sake, carrying the weight of our sin and shame.

What a friend we have in Jesus! Jesus is **the** friend who loves at all times, the One who stands with us in adversity. When we stand accused, He is our **Defender**. In pain, He is our **Comforter**. In weakness, He is our **Strength**. In despair, He is our **Hope**. In confusion, He is our **Wisdom**. In turbulence, He is our **Peace**. When we are afraid, He is our **Hiding Place**.

All of this—and more!—is ours in Christ. Do you know Him? Have you received His forgiveness?

My dear people, salvation is just the beginning of friendship with God; like any friendship, our relationship is meant to deepen. We are

meant to grow in our enjoyment of Him. Our experience of His love, joy, and peace can deepen. We can grow in the ability to hear His voice, to respond to His prompting, and to join in His work.

How do we grow in our friendship with Jesus? A person after God's own heart centres their life around Him. We spend time with Him in prayer—speaking and listening. As we read the Bible, we come to know who He is, what He loves, and how to respond to Him moment by moment.

The Lord loves you with an everlasting love; I pray that you might receive this love and embrace the gift of friendship He offers to you.

Worship

Introduce Megan/Pray

Benediction