

**My Dear Sisters and Brothers in Christ,**

**Yesterday it was my privilege to participate in the funeral service of young Ryan Miller. Ryan, the son of Doug and Carole Miller, was the young volunteer fireman from West Chester who died in a horrific motorcycle accident last weekend. He was only 25 years old. What made his death so unbearably sad was that it came to be only 14 months after the death of his then-27 year old brother, Robbie, in an eerily similar accident.**

**I felt privileged to participate in this service for a number of reasons. First and foremost because I am honored to count the Miller Family among my friends and was honored to be asked to offer words of comfort for them, their family, and many friends. But, perhaps the greater privilege was in recognizing that I was in the “kingdom of heaven” of which Jesus speaks to us today.**

**The funeral was held in St. Paul’s Baptist Church, the oldest African-American Church in Chester County. I was honored to share the pulpit with Rev. Jerry Schwartz, a Unitarian Pastor who is the chaplain of the West Chester Fire Department and chaplain for the Chester County Association of Fire Chiefs, who presided, and Elder Anthony Edwards, another friend of the Millers, is the Assistant Pastor of the Evangelistic Temple Church of God in Christ of Casa Grande, Arizona. Some of you who are Eagles fans might remember him as a running back who played for the Eagles, and later for the Arizona Cardinals, where he continues to serve as Director of Player Development.**

**The Church was filled to overflowing with people of every race, religious denomination, and, I assume, political persuasion. There were firefighters, police, emergency medical technicians, athletes, and bikers. We were old and young and everything in between. We were gathered in love to share the unspeakable sorrow of Doug and Carole and their beautiful family. We were of one mind, one heart, one spirit.**

**From the pulpit where I was seated, I looked out at this vast throng of tear-stained faces of every hue, men and women, boys and girls. A magnificent rendition of the song, *HIS EYE IS ON THE SPARROW*, was being sung. I couldn’t help but think this really is the Kingdom of God. This is who God wants us to be and how He wants us to be to each other. The Spirit of God was truly in this place because each of us who spoke, none knowing what the other would say, spoke to this reality. It was love that brought us together and love would carry us on.**

**For me the highlight of the service was when Elder Edwards, in the midst of his sermon, broke into song, offering these words to Carole and Doug:**

**I've had some good days; I've had some hills to climb;  
I've had some weary days; I've had some weary nights;  
And when I look around; And think things over  
All of my good days, they outweigh my bad days.  
So I won't complain!  
Sometimes my clouds hang low. I ask the Lord to see them go.  
And then I ask the question, "Lord, why so much pain?"  
But God knows what's best for me.  
Although my weary, weary eyes can't see.  
So I'll say, "Thank you, Lord!" I won't complain!  
God's been so good to me. The Lord has been so good to me,  
More than the world could ever be, the Lord was been good to me.  
And he dried all my tears away, And he turned all my midnights;  
He turned them all into day.  
So, I'll say, "Thank you, Lord!" I just say, "Thank you, Lord!"  
I'll just say, "Thank you, Lord! I won't complain!"**

**As I let this song wash over me, the words that St. Paul speaks to us today came to me, "Brothers and Sisters, We know that all things work for good for those who love God, who are called according to his purpose." No matter the sorrow; no matter the grief; no matter the evil that we sometimes have to face, we possess a treasure finer than any pearl; greater than all the riches of the earth—the blessed assurance that we have God in our midst who loves us so that He will see us through every trial, every tribulation, every illness, every sorrow, every pain, every sinful condition, every failure, every defeat, every weakness. And that blessed assurance is the cross before us; the cross behind us; and, thank you, Jesus, the Risen Christ who walks beside us.**

**All we have to do to possess that treasure is surrender ourselves "to his purpose". And "his purpose" is simple. It is to accept and trust in his love and then love in return.**

**That love was so apparent in St. Paul's Baptist Church yesterday. I wonder! Could a stranger walking into our Church have a similar experience among us today?**