

Mark J. Callahan
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In the middle of Psalm 8, we read, *“when I look at your heavens, the work of your fingers, the moon and the stars that you have established; what are human beings that you are mindful of them, mortals that you care for them?”*

It’s a mind-boggling question: how is it that the omnipotent, powerful God who created the vast complex workings of the cosmos also has a heart for people like you and me – not only cares for us, but knits us together from the inside out? In Genesis 1 we read that we are made *in God’s image*. Indeed, the psalmist writes, *“you have made human beings a little lower than God, and crowned them with glory and honor.”*

One could certainly say that Mark Callahan was *just a little lower than God*: world-renowned cardiologist, professor at the Mayo School of Medicine, deep thinker, patron of the arts. Indeed, Mark’s status and reputation was certainly *crowned with glory and honor*. But Mark could also be found on the living room floor wrestling with his nieces and nephews. Or trekking through the mosquito-infested Boundary Waters with teenage Boy Scouts. Or driving shut-ins to church on the Zumbro Lutheran bus. Hardly images of glory and honor. So if he was made in the image of God, perhaps in this man who cared so much for the human heart, we can get a glimpse of God’s own heart. It is a heart full of compassion. Forgiveness. Generosity. Wonder. And perhaps a surprise or two as well.

Mark John Callahan came into this world June 17, 1952. He was the firstborn of John and Dorothy Callahan, a young doctor and his bride from Boston. Shortly after Mark was born, Dr. John and Dorothy moved from the East Coast to the medical frontier: Rochester, Minn. Life in the Callahan household was certainly busy. Baby Mark was soon followed by Chris, then Peter, Paul, Joan, Peg and Betsy. As each successive sibling came along, Mark relished the role of big brother a little bit more. And the entire Callahan clan shaped Mark as he developed his love of learning, realized the importance of family and grew in his appreciation for smart, strong, opinionated women.

In Mark, we saw a glimpse of God’s passionate heart. After finishing at Harvard, Mark came back to the University of Minnesota to go to med school. In 1976 he lived in a graduate residence hall with a brilliant law student named Jane Anderson. It didn’t take long for them to hit it off – by Christmas they were a couple and the next summer they were engaged. Jane says she married Mark so she wouldn’t have to go to too many

sporting events, and he married her so he wouldn't have to talk about medicine all the time. There were certainly plenty of other interests they shared: music and the arts, theater and politics and travel. They would have celebrated their 34th wedding anniversary in June.

In Mark, we saw a glimpse of God's devoted heart. In 1981 Matt was born, and Sarah right behind him. Rochester was smaller then, but Mark's hours at the clinic were just as busy. Sarah says she didn't realize until recently that not every adult works every single weekend. Still, Mark made it a point to be home for dinner, and choir concerts and scout camping trips. There were family vacations to Disneyworld and Yosemite and South Dakota. It was left to Jane to be the family disciplinarian, though. There was no threat of 'wait until your father gets home' at the Callahan household. Mark was a total softy. Sarah said: *I used to think that meant he was weak. I don't think that anymore. It's what gave him his strength.*

In Mark, we saw a glimpse of God's playful heart. For someone who specialized in the intricate and mysterious inner workings of the human body, nothing got Mark excited like checking out the heavens. He was captivated by the stars in high school and especially loved dragging out his telescope. Many a Rochester Boy Scout earned their Astronomy merit badge under Mark's instruction. Mark's sense of humor especially came out in public. Whether it was teaching community ed classes at the Mayo Planetarium or in front of a room of Med School students, he could be both straight man or funny guy.

In Mark, we saw a glimpse of God's generous heart. Despite his busy schedule, Mark was always incredibly giving of his time. He took countless medical mission trips, to Haiti and Mexico and Guatemala. In fact, he was supposed to leave for Guatemala with a Young Adults group this week. He served on the board of the Lyra Baroque Orchestra and as Scoutmaster and physician in residence for Troop 82. I've been told you haven't seen a Scout First Aid kit until you've seen one assembled by a Mayo doc.

In Mark, we saw a glimpse of God's compassionate heart. It's what made him so very good at what he did. Mark was surely as skilled a medical professional as you'll find. But what set him apart was his unending care for his patients. He was patient, kind, disarming, and gentle. And he showed the same kind of respect for everyone on his medical team. For Mark, it wasn't about getting the credit. It was about taking the best possible care of those in need, and doing it together.

Yes, if all you know of God is what you saw in Mark Callahan, you would have a pretty good picture. But there is one more glimpse of God that needs to be seen. It's a glimpse of the same unfathomable mystery that Mark saw in the stars, that God is bigger than we can begin to comprehend. We need that glimpse because sometimes things in life happen that we just don't understand. Things like cancer and suffering and those we love being taken away too soon. We need that glimpse of God in those times to help us heal, and give us hope.

I know Mark caught this glimpse before he died. On Dec. 18, Zumbro held its traditional Advent service of Lessons and Carols at St. Mary's chapel. The theme of the service was "Lost in the Night." It centered around the darkness we all face at some time or another, when our lives seem to be overcome by injustice or sorrow or pain. Again and again the congregation repeated a plaintive refrain: *Will not day come soon? Will not day come soon?* During the service, we read scripture passages that reminded us that God is faithful; that when we feel lost God will find us and lead us from darkness into light. Mark read one of the lessons that night, a passage from 2 Peter that unites mystery with love. It began:

But do not ignore this one fact, beloved, that with the Lord one day is like a thousand years, and a thousand years are like one day. The Lord is not slow about his promise, as some think of slowness, but is patient with you, not wanting any to perish, but all to come to repentance. But the day of the Lord will come like a thief, and then the heavens will pass away with a loud noise, and the elements will be dissolved with fire, and the earth and everything that is done on it will be disclosed... Therefore, beloved, while you are waiting for these things, strive to be found by him at peace, without spot or blemish; and regard the patience of our Lord as salvation.

Friends, those words are given by the same God who stretches the spangled heavens, who knows all our days, who weeps when we weep and brings us light when life feels most dark. Even when we do not understand, God does. God gives us glimpses so that we might come to trust and believe.

Dear Jane, Sarah, Matt, family, friends, colleagues and patients, may God's grace bind up your broken hearts today and bring you peace. The Lord who knows each star in the vast cosmos also cares for you. Day is coming soon. Amen.