

Two hospital rooms

By [David Lower](#)

July 14, 2014

For more commentary on this week's readings, see the [Reflections on the Lectionary](#) page, which includes Lower's full Living by the Word column as well as past magazine and blog content. For full-text access to all articles, [subscribe](#) to the Century.

A few years ago, while serving as a hospital chaplain, I received a call to a dying man's bedside. Upon entering the room where a beautiful old man was breathing his last breaths, his son introduced himself to me: "Hi. I'm the oldest son, John."

"Nice to meet you, John," I replied, "I'm someone else's oldest son, David. My heart goes out to you in this sad and holy moment."

John then introduced his dad. "Well, I'm pleased to report that Dad's been saved for 27 years now, thank God, so there's nothing to worry about here."

In my own life, I have only come to know God's saving work in the present tense, as something that happens continuously to me. But I celebrate anyone's faithful response to the truth made known in Jesus Christ, so I responded with a genuine "Hallelujah!"

My new friend John continued: "Pastor, we're all set here. The reason I sent for you is because you may want to pay a visit next door. That poor man, he's"—here his voice dropped to a whisper—"unsaved. Unchurched. You know what I mean?"

I was pretty sure I knew what he meant. This young man was encouraging me to reach the old guy next door with Jesus, so he could get a ticket to heaven before it was too late. John called him "unsaved" and "unchurched"; I had a hunch that he might have met some other description like "Muslim," "mainline Presbyterian," or even "went to church but never really liked it."

I did not discuss Christian doctrine with my new friend the salvation-whisperer. I did learn that his dad's neighbor was at peace, surrounded by loved ones after a

laudable life of service to others. What I'll never forget is the revealing picture I caught as I walked away. The two rooms shared a doorway, with a thin partition between. I stood in the doorway and saw two families, probably with very different worldviews, surrounding their departing loved ones in pure expressions of love. The beauty on either side of the wall was similarly striking and holy, and it was hard to imagine God feeling anything but glorified by it all.

Read more in [Lower's Living by the Word column for this week](#).