

He Lays Down His Life

Good Shepherd Weekend: April 25, 2021

4 Easter: Year B: John 10: 11-18

King of Glory Lutheran

Pastor Ruth Ann Loughry

John 10:11-18 [Jesus said:] ¹¹“I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep. ¹²The hired hand, who is not the shepherd and does not own the sheep, sees the wolf coming and leaves the sheep and runs away—and the wolf snatches them and scatters them. ¹³The hired hand runs away because a hired hand does not care for the sheep. ¹⁴I am the good shepherd. I know my own and my own know me, ¹⁵just as the Father knows me and I know the Father. And I lay down my life for the sheep. ¹⁶I have other sheep that do not belong to this fold. I must bring them also, and they will listen to my voice. So there will be one flock, one shepherd. ¹⁷For this reason the Father loves me, because I lay down my life in order to take it up again. ¹⁸No one takes it from me, but I lay it down of my own accord. I have power to lay it down, and I have power to take it up again. I have received this command from my Father.”

We can never out-give God. But our lives are saved only because of the one who gave his life for us. Jesus our Savior who laid down his life for His sheep. Motivated by God's love we are called to do the same in little and large ways. Thanks be to God!

God's grace and peace to you this morning! We are Easter people still amazed at the open tomb and so we rejoice to say, “Christ is Risen!” He is Risen indeed.”

The 23rd Psalm is one of the most famous of all the Psalms. Many of us have committed it to heart and memory. Let's say it together if you know it. If you don't just listen to these incredible words.

¹The LORD is my shepherd, I shall not want.

²He makes me lie down in green pastures;

he leads me beside still waters;

³he restores my soul.

He leads me in right paths

for his name's sake.

⁴Even though I walk through the darkest valley,

I fear no evil;

for you are with me;

your rod and your staff —

they comfort me.

⁵You prepare a table before me

in the presence of my enemies;

you anoint my head with oil;

my cup overflows.

⁶Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me

all the days of my life,

and I shall dwell in the house of the LORD

my whole life long.

What comes to mind when you hear this Psalm? God who provides? God who protects? God who guides and watches over? Yes! The Bible is filled with scriptures referencing God as a Good Shepherd who looks after and takes care of the flock. This Shepherd, finds the most lush green grass and streams running with the clearest water. He is also a protector, fending off enemies who might want to hurt or destroy any sheep. Likewise, God the Holy Shepherd is very clear that other shepherds must never hurt their flocks, their people.

Jesus tells the disciples that He is the Good Shepherd. He makes the distinction between a hired man and Himself. A hired man who doesn't own the sheep or know them intimately will quickly run away when the wolves come. But, the Good Shepherd will give his very life for these precious creatures. Five times in these short seven verses, Jesus says, "I lay down my life for the sheep!"

In this Easter season, on this side of the open tomb, we fully recognize we have a Good Shepherd who laid down His very life for us! Praise God. Praise God.

This year, the phrase 'laying down one's life' has new meaning. We've heard the stories of emergency personnel, particularly medical workers who in the midst of their daily work, acquired Covid-19 and died from it.

We've heard the stories of nurses and doctors who answered the call – when they were already retired – volunteered and returned to work. They contracted Covid- 19 and passed away. They all laid down their lives.

If you've had a family member in the military and they came anywhere near combat, you too, know on a very real level what it means to be ready to die for a cause...to lay down one's life.

Jesus laid down His life on Good Friday. He died out of love for the whole world. What joy we have in God who chose to die for the brokenness of all of humanity. If we return to His body broken, suffocating on the cross for hours...this certainly is a Good Shepherd like none other!

The reading we heard this morning from 1 John calls us to do the same. Listen!

¹⁶We know love by this, that Jesus Christ laid down his life for us—and we ought to lay down our lives for one another. ¹⁷How does God's love abide in anyone who has the world's goods and sees a brother or sister in need and yet refuses help?¹⁸Little children, let us love, not in word or speech, but in truth and action. (1 John3:16-18)

The author of 1 John inspires us to lay down our lives for each other as well. Because Jesus did, we must as well. Yet hear those first words again, "We know love by this...we know love that Jesus laid down his life for us. Love is the motivating factor. How do we have God's love inside if we refuse to help? That just isn't possible!

A friend tells the story of her grandfather, a faithful man who earned a modest income. Each year when tax time rolled around, he was audited. According to tax records he earned so little and gave away so much. The astounded auditors questioned him, wondering why he gave so much of his income to the church. Incredulous, he responded, "You can't out give God."

(<https://members.sundaysandseasons.com/Home/TextsAndResources#resources>)

The grandfather is right, we can't out give God! Yet we can try! And if we try to out give God, if we try to give ourselves away because we believe God demands it or we have to, then we've missed the whole point.

Laying down our lives, giving of ourselves isn't a morality lesson. We call ourselves Christian, because we follow the Christ. We desire to live as Jesus did; giving of Himself from a place of love. We are motivated not by our own pride, ego or desire to "be good", but instead by a God who so loved the world, who laid down His life.

You may have seen another story this week, about a hiker lost in southern California mountains. Just before his cell phone battery lost charge, he texted a photo to a friend. That photo wasn't enough to help the local police find the lost hiker. Then police texted a plea for help. A complete stranger with a funny hobby found the hiker's coordinates. This stranger he loves to find coordinates of places from movies or pictures. He was quite humble about the success, saying, "If you have a gift you should use it."

How will we lay down our lives this week? There are a million small and large ways we can. The most fascinating thing begins to happen when we do. It fills a need in us that is holy. Make space this week to find someone else some clear water, some lush grass to rest, a place of comfort and nourishment. Don't do it for the accolades or thanks. Do it for Jesus. He'll understand. Amen.