

Rev. Timothy M. Crummitt

Fourth Sunday of Easter - Year B

St. Paul's Lutheran Church

Acts 4:5-12

Psalm 23

1 John 3:16-24

John 10:11-18

04/22/2018

Gospel

The Holy Gospel according to St. John:

[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.”

The Gospel of our Lord

Prayer

Let us pray,

Amen.

The Good Shepherd

“What is love like?” So begins one of my favorite scenes from the 2004 comedy *Anchorman* starring Will Ferrell. It’s hard to watch a movie without the theme of love showing up somehow, which is interesting, since defining love becomes something that we spend a great deal of time trying to do. I love movies, and you won’t have to spend a long time with me before I mention some film or quote a movie. So when it comes to one of the world’s most popular topics, what does the world’s most popular medium have to say on the subject?

“what do you want? You want the moon? Just say the word and I’ll throw a lasso around it and pull it down.”

-It’s a Wonderful Life

“The greatest thing you’ll ever learn is just to love, and be loved in return.”

-Moulin Rouge

“I would rather share one lifetime with you than face all the ages of this world alone.”

-Lord of the Rings: Fellowship of the Ring

“Of all the gin joints in all the towns in all the world, she had to walk into mine.”

-Casablanca

“I am in love with you. And I know that love is just a shout into the void, and that oblivion is inevitable, and that we’re all doomed, and that one day all our labors will be returned to dust. And I know that the sun will swallow the only earth we will ever have. And I am in love with you.”

-The Fault in Our Stars

“Love is passion, obsession, someone you can’t live without. I say, fall head over heels. Find someone you can love like crazy and who will love you the same way back. How do you find him? Well, you forget your head, you listen to your heart. And I’m not hearing any heart. Cause the truth is, honey, there’s no sense living your life without this. To make the journey and not fall deeply in love, well, you haven’t lived a life at all. But you have to try, cause if you haven’t tried, you haven’t lived.”

-Meet Joe Black

And finally,

Princess Leia: *“I love you”*

Han Solo: *“I know”*

-Star Wars: Episode V: The Empire Strikes Back

But how about this?

“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.”

Now that’s a whole different type of love. That’s the type of love that changes the world, that turns everything upside down. *“I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep.”* It’s a love born out of sacrifice. I’ve said it before, but I believe that love is a decision. And here in today’s text we see Jesus talking about his decision to lay down his life for the sheep. It’s the story of our God who unrelentingly pursues us, loving us even in the midst of our scorn. Yet, God keeps loving us, up to the point of no return, deciding to die for all of humanity, knowing pain that none of us will ever feel, sacrificing it all for you and for me.

Here in this season of Easter we take a break from the post-resurrection stories in the Gospels to look back at the words of the person who saved us all. It might have been dismissed the first time these words from the middle of the Gospel of John were spoken, but reflecting on them now leaves us with no mistake about how serious Jesus was when he spoke them.

It’s a sobering reminder for those of us who call ourselves pastors. Here, in the midst of the joy of the resurrection, the joy of the empty tomb, I’m confronted with a reminder of just how serious this calling truly is. One scholar writes: *“Many of us have perhaps thought of ministry as a profession. But ministry is not a profession, it is a vocation, a call (vocatio=call). We have been called by God into service. The ministry is not about ourselves (profession) but*

about the people we serve (vocation). When we understand ministry as a profession, then we only care about ourselves -- our career, our success, our retirement, etc. -- not necessarily about the people we serve. We become hired hands, those who do not care for the sheep (John 10:13). But when we understand ministry as a vocation then we care for others to the point of giving our lives for them.”¹

But this is more than just a text and sermon for pastors, it’s a reminder that we live out our lives in response to the love that Jesus Christ has shown us. That’s why I love the section from the second reading in 1 John. Listen again; *“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.”* We only know what love is because God has shown it to us!

And in response we are called to model Christ to others, to make Jesus known “not in word or speech, but in truth and action.” That’s the hard part, though. We Christians love to talk the talk, but we often fail when it comes to walking the walk. We claim to be both saint and sinner, but we tend to spend a great deal more time in the sin camp than in the freedom that God activates in us as saints.

We have within us the potential for so much good! Why do we so often fail? The shepherd laying down their life for the sheep is a story that reminds us of the type of life that we are called to live. We can never be the one true good shepherd, but we can be more than hired hands. I’ve been told that my predecessor would often say that she wasn’t the shepherd, Jesus

¹https://www.workingpreacher.org/preaching.aspx?commentary_id=3628

Christ was, she was just the sheep dog. And I love that analogy! It's great! We can't save the whole world, but we can listen to our master. We don't know the way, but we can be guided by someone who does, someone who can show us true love and life. And we can do all of this while modeling behavior that actually cares and supports everyone, regardless of who they are. That's how we respond in love, that's how we live out the joy of Easter. Christ is Risen! Amen.