



LAKWOOD PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

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Real Love

1 John 3:16-24

“The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want.” Such familiar words. Words that have brought us comfort, words that remind us who walks with us, words that remind us of loved ones, words that we like to hear in the King James translation!

This morning we will continue with our series *EYEWITNESS*, as we continue our journey through the first letter of John. These passages from the first letter of John are lectionary texts and this week the lectionary also gives us Psalm 23. It is so familiar that many of us can recite it; it is where we often go for hope and strength.

He leads me beside still waters;
He restores my soul.
He leads me in right paths
for his name’s sake.

Even though I walk through the darkest valley,
I fear no evil;
for you are with me;

Beautiful words that are connected to 1 John as we will see a little later.

If you have been following the series, you will remember that the author of 1 John was writing to address the claims of false teachers and that the central theme of the letter is love. We have heard that we truly know ourselves in the light of who we are as God’s children. We have heard about confessing our sin and God’s grace. We have heard about false teachers and the need to look out for false teaching. And we have read that love for others is a sign of the children of God. The next step for the author is to tell his readers what that love looks like.

The English language is somewhat limiting when it comes to talking about love. When a young person says they love their partner it may describe deep devotion, or deep physical passion. When I say I love my wife or children surely, it’s not the same as I love baseball, or I love Clint Eastwood movies. Of course not, and for the most part we understand that.

What is real love? We may have our own ideas When we meet that person who is the one, that is real love; the love we have for children or parents, that is real love. The look your puppy gives you, that is real love. Your passion for your college football team, that is real love. I looked up real love online, and found words like unconditional, unbreakable devotion, authentic connection. I really liked that one.

You may know that the Greeks had four words for love that distinguished among the various affections that we call love in the English language.

Agape is love that is devoted to the welfare of the beloved.

Eros is romantic love or sexual passion.

Phelos is friendship or brotherly love,

Storge has to do with love between family members and can be also used in other ways.

The type of love in 1 John 3 is agape love. The love that is concerned for the welfare of the beloved, the highest form of love, the love of God for us and us for God.

So let's see this description of real love from the author of 1 John 3.

Reading from verse 16:

"We know love by this, that he laid down his life for us—and we ought to lay down our lives for one another. 17 How does God's love abide in anyone who has the world's goods and sees a brother or sister[f] in need and yet refuses help?

18 Little children, let us love, not in word or speech, but in truth and action. 19 And by this we will know that we are from the truth and will reassure our hearts before him 20 whenever our hearts condemn us; for God is greater than our hearts, and he knows everything. 21 Beloved, if our hearts do not condemn us, we have boldness before God; 22 and we receive from him whatever we ask, because we obey his commandments and do what pleases him.

23 And this is his commandment, that we should believe in the name of his Son Jesus Christ and love one another, just as he has commanded us. 24 All who obey his commandments abide in him, and he abides in them. And by this we know that he abides in us, by the Spirit that he has given us.

We know love by this, that He laid down His life for us and we ought to lay down our lives for one another.

We had a deep conversation in confirmation class a few weeks ago when Pastor Joy was teaching and talking about this very thing that Jesus had laid down His life for us and then was raised to life. One of the kids raised a hand to say, "You just described Gandalf!" If you are familiar with *The Lord of the Rings* books or movies you will know what they meant. Gandalf seems to die to save the others in the fellowship from the Balrog. It's all very exciting. We spoke in the class about Jesus laying down His life and what that means for us. It wasn't always an easy conversation, but it was a good one. Our kids had some deep and challenging thoughts. We also mentioned that the author of that book series was a follower of Jesus and perhaps that had some influence in his writing.

Sara and I visited with Dottie and Hardy Fletcher this week, I think we kind of invited ourselves over to see their back yard! During our conversation they told us about a trip they took to Normandy where they saw the American cemetery and memorial there. They mentioned how moving it was to see families and old soldiers return to visit the place. Even speaking of it years later was emotional. You may have witnessed similar scenes at the memorials in Washington. When we consider those who paid the ultimate price for their

country we should not help but be filled with emotion and gratitude, and it may be a tender and real thing for you as you consider family members who paid such a price.

Speaking to Dottie and Hardy reminded me of the scenes in the Steven Spielberg movie *Saving Private Ryan* that were filmed at that same cemetery in Normandy. And the emotion involved in Ryan's return to that place. It brought tears to me the first time I saw it and again when I re-watched those scenes this week.

As I considered these things and this scripture that has been spinning around in my head all week, it led me to consider what it means for me to lay down my life for one another. What does it mean for us to lay down our lives for one another?

The writer of 1 John helps us with that as well,

How does God's love abide in anyone who has the world's goods and sees a brother or sister[f] in need and yet refuses help?

18 Little children, let us love, not in word or speech, but in truth and action. 19 And by this we will know that we are from the truth and will reassure our hearts before him 20 whenever our hearts condemn us."

Laying down our life for one another leads us to a sacrificial lifestyle where our needs may have to take second place for those we love and perhaps those we do not. I am sure we have all experienced that moment when we give up plans or give up personal agendas or give up time or give up dollars or other material possessions for others. It may be as simple as involving your kid in a project that you know will now take twice as long. It may be, going back to the 23rd Psalm, when we see someone walking through the valley of the shadow of death, whatever that may be for them, and we walk with them. It may be taking time to listen when we have so much to say.

Laying down our lives daily isn't so much about dying for someone else, as it is living for someone else, putting their needs ahead of our own as an act of love. A sacrificial lifestyle.

I mentioned earlier that the lectionary for this week included this passage from 1 John and the 23rd Psalm. It also included a passage from John chapter 10 and all 3 passages tie in wonderfully.

In Psalm 23 we read The Lord is my Shepherd. Who is my shepherd? The Lord. In John Chapter 10, Jesus says,

"I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep."

Jesus' listeners would have been as familiar as we are with the 23rd Psalm. They would have seen the connection.

Then we read in 1 John,

“We know love by this, that he laid down his life for us.”

All 3 passages are tied together.

This is Real Love.

You may be called to actually lay down your life, you may be called to live a Mother Theresa type life, but even if you are not, you are called to show this real love by how you sacrificially live your life for others. I don't think this means we are not smart about how we do that; I don't think it means we cannot consider how we personally can move forward and improve our situation. Those who are blessed with much are often the ones who can help others the most. But it does mean we live sacrificially. If we want to show the love that the author is talking about, we know that this real love is not just accepting Christ and believing in Christ. Real love means that our faith is lived out by what we do. And part of what we do is lay down our lives for others as Jesus did for us.

The Easter story, the cross, the empty grave must be our inspiration for doing so.

Thinking back to *Saving Private Ryan*. If you remember back to the movie, and apologies for any spoilers but it has been out a while, you may remember the movie starts with Ryan at Normandy then the movie is his memories on how he survived. Tom Hanks character Captain Miller is tasked with finding Ryan and bringing him home. In the process Captain Miller dies. The last words he says to Ryan are “Earn this. Earn it.” Then he passes.

In the incredibly moving scene at the end of the movie in Normandy, Ryan is on his knees at Miller's grave in tears. His wife comes to offer support and he turns to her and says, “Tell me I have lived a good life, tell me I'm a good man.” It's an incredible scene.

We realize he has lived his whole life trying to be worthy of the price that Miller paid for him.

When Jesus was laying down His life for me and for you, He did not say “Earn this.” He did not ask us to earn it. We cannot. He only spoke words of grace.

But what if our response to Jesus laying down His life was like Ryan's response to Miller laying down his life, that we had that desire to live a good life, to be a good man or woman, to be worthy of the death on the cross. We know from scripture it was done without that expectation, but what if we lived like that anyway? What difference would it make to how we lay down our lives for those around us?

We find real love in sacrificial living. And perhaps in sacrificial living we learn how to really love. May that be my walk and may it be yours.

Amen.