

Fourth Of Easter B21

April 25, 2021

So often we think love is about emotions, feelings, and sweet words.

There's nothing wrong with those things and they can be a legitimate part of love.

We all want to be told we are loved.

We want to feel that warmth, security, and tenderness that comes with love.

At some point, however, love, if it is to be real, must become real revealed not only by words and feelings but by actions.

“Little children,” John writes in his first letter, “let us love, not in word or speech, but in truth and action” (1 John 3:18).

So what does this have to do with Easter, resurrection, and the Good Shepherd?

Everything.

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God's love for humanity became tangible/REAL in the life, death, and resurrection of his Son, our Lord Jesus Christ.

God indorsed love.

“We know love by this,” John tells us, “that he laid down his life for us” (1 John 3:16).

In laying down his life Jesus chooses us.
He is not the victim of another’s power or agendas.

If he is a victim at all, he is the victim of his own all consuming divine love.

His life was not taken from him, it was given to us; a choice and gift he freely made.

That is what makes Jesus the good shepherd.

The hired hand trades time for wages.
He conducts business.
He cares nothing about the sheep.

The good shepherd, however, lives and dies for love.
He lays down his life for his sheep.

He knows them and they know him, just as the Father knows him and he knows the Father.

The very same relationship that Jesus has with his Father we can have with Jesus.

This relationship of knowing is one of intimacy and love;
between the Father and Jesus

and between Jesus and humanity.

Jesus is the one who reveals God's life and love.

This intimate love is at the heart of resurrection and the resurrected life.

Resurrection is about a laying down life kind of love.

Four times in today's gospel Jesus says that he lays down his life.

Four times he says to us, "I love you."

Four times he describes the pattern for our lives. John's letter is explicit about this pattern:

"He laid down his life for us and we ought to lay down our lives for one another" (1 John 3:16).

For Christ, love is lived; and how we live is always a choice.

It is a choice driven by our recognition of, compassion for, and willingness to do something about the life and needs of another,

whether they are in our own families, this parish, or on the other side of town.

We cannot claim to believe in Jesus if we are unwilling to lay down our life for another, regardless of who he or she is.

If we believe, we will love.

If we do not love, neither do we believe.

Our belief in Jesus cannot be separated from how and whom we love.

Our belief in his name is revealed in laying down our life for another.

Even if we never say the name “Jesus,” laying down our life for another reveals our belief in that name.

Whenever we lay down our life for another we proclaim that resurrection is not just an event in the past.

It is a present reality, not just a historical remembrance. Laying down our life makes Jesus’ resurrection tangible and real.

The only reason we can ever lay down our life for another is because Jesus first laid down his life for us.

The shepherd never takes his sheep somewhere he is unwilling to go.

He never asks of his sheep something he is himself unwilling to give.

Every time we lay down our life in love for another we remember Jesus’ death and

proclaim his resurrection even as we await the day of his coming.

The opportunities for a laying down life kind of love are everywhere.

You don't have to go far.

They are the family and friends we see everyday.
They are the people of this parish and of this town.

They are the strangers who pass through our lives.
They are the anonymous ones talked about as issues of poverty,
hunger, homelessness, education.

The opportunities for laying down life love are not just
circumstances.

They are people, human beings created in the image and
likeness of God.

We need only be present, open our eyes, listen, and pay attention
to know how

and where love asks us to lay down our life for another.

A laying down life kind of love means we will have to change
our usual routines.

It is no longer business as usual.

The life and well being of "the other" now sets our agenda,
guides our decisions, and determines our actions.

That sounds a lot like how the good shepherd lived and died.

Laying down our life is not, however, the end of life. It wasn't for Jesus, nor will it be for us.

It is, rather, the beginning of a new life, a more authentic life, a life that looks a lot like Jesus' life.

It is the life in and by which we hear the voice of the good shepherd call our name and we follow where he leads.

Call it what you want, Easter, resurrection, the good shepherd; it's all the same, a laying down life kind of love.