

1 John 3:16-24

3:16 We know love by this, that he laid down his life for us--and we ought to lay down our lives for one another.

3:17 How 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?

3:18 Little children, let us love, not in word or speech, but in truth and action.

3:19 And by this we will know that we are from the truth and will reassure our hearts before him

3:20 whenever our hearts condemn us; for God is greater than our hearts, and he knows everything.

3:21 Beloved, if our hearts do not condemn us, we have boldness before God;

3:22 and we receive from him whatever we ask, because we obey his commandments and do what pleases him.

3:23 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.

3:24 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.

John 10:11-18

10:11 "I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep.

10:12 The 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.

10:13 The hired hand runs away because a hired hand does not care for the sheep.

10:14 I am the good shepherd. I know my own and my own know me,

10:15 just as the Father knows me and I know the Father. And I lay down my life for the sheep.

10:16 I 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.

10:17 For this reason the Father loves me, because I lay down my life in order to take it up again.

10:18 No 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."

Proclamation of the Word

In his book *Craddock Stories*, celebrated preacher Fred Craddock tells of an evening when he and his wife were eating dinner in a little restaurant in the Smokey Mountains. A strange and elderly man came over to their table and introduced himself. "I am from around these parts," he said. "My mother was not married, and the shame the community directed toward her was also directed toward me. Whenever I went to town with my mother, I could see people staring at us, making guesses about who my daddy was. At school, I ate lunch alone. In my early teens, I began attending a little church but always left before church was over, because I was afraid somebody would ask me what a boy like me was doing in church. One day, before I could escape, I felt a hand on my shoulder. It was the minister. He looked closely at my face. I knew that he too was trying to guess who my father was. 'Well, boy, you are a child of. . .' and then he paused. When he spoke again he said, 'Boy, you are a child of God. I see a striking resemblance.' Then he swatted me on the bottom and said, 'Now, you go on and claim your inheritance.' I left church that day a different person," the now elderly man said. "In fact, that was the beginning of my life."

"What's your name?" Dr. Craddock asked.

He answered, "Ben Hooper. My name is Ben Hooper." Dr. Craddock said he vaguely recalled from when he was a kid, his father talking about how the people of Tennessee had twice elected a fellow who had been born out of wedlock as the governor of their state. His name was Ben Hooper.ⁱ

Today when we baptized Adelyn, I quoted this verse from 1 John,

"See what love the Father has given us, that we should be called children of God; and that is what we are." ⁱⁱ

Through Baptism into the covenant of grace, we become God's children. We belong to God and have been created in God's image. Old Ben Hooper learned that because he

had a church that helped him believe that. Every child, no matter the age, needs to know that so that, according to 1 John, we can grow to believe in God and to love others. That is the church's mission. As we Bridge Generations in the coming weeks as a church, we have a mission to all God's children even those who are not here yet. Jesus even says that there are sheep not of this fold for whom he came.

Jesus' words from the gospel today reminds us that Jesus is the good shepherd in contrast to the hired hand. Perhaps a better image for us than shepherd is manager. A manager watches over the business for the owner. A good manager cares for the business as if the business belongs to him. Jesus says that his sheep know him and are cared for because they belong to him. In contrast a hired clerk might be more careless and less responsible. A good shepherd knows and loves the sheep, but the hired hand does not. The hired hand is probably clocking in to make a paycheck. A good shepherd gives his life for his sheep, caring for them more than his own life and comfort. One part of our mission is to give children of all ages a place to know they belong. They belong to the Family of God and are somebody because of that. Just like the governor of Tennessee, Ben Hooper.

In the Roman world when the new testament was written, adoption was not as much about caring for orphans as it is now. In fact, youth and adults were adopted. Adoption was about having a name and an inheritance. In fact in baptism we all share the same last name. Your name is Christian, you belong to God the Father, and you have an inheritance to claim.

Maybe a good shepherd looks like a trustworthy manager or maybe a good shepherd looks like a crusty ol' Texas rancher...

Allen Walworth has been helping us with our Bridging Generations campaign. He told the story of sitting in a living room with church people near Lubbock, Texas discussing the vision and needs for this particular church. An old crusty rancher stood up in the gathering to speak. Allen said he just got out of his way. The rancher said, "I am listening to this young whipper snapper, and I am thinking about what he said. You know the last time our church had a need, the preacher came round asking for money. I think I gave \$5000. Now when the Children's Hospital needed money, I think I gave \$100,000 because the missus she loved that hospital. Then when the symphony came

by needing money, we gave \$50,000 because the missus, she loved the symphony. But 6 months ago when my wife died, I didn't hear from the hospital or the symphony. I heard from you. In fact, I don't think I have eaten Sunday dinner alone since she died. You have invited me to dinner after church and cared for me. I'll be giving a bigger gift than that to this church because of the way you show God's love."

The good folks of that church had shepherded him through the loss of his wife. Now he was saying thanks by leading and supporting his church. That is laying down your life for others. What is more essential to life than money?

"Little children, let us not love, not in word or speech, but in truth and action," writes John. He reminds us that we are to love in our actions, to show love. You and I are called to be "Sermons in shoes." "Little children, let us love, not in word or speech, but in truth and action" (1 John 3:18) especially to a brother or sister who has needs. Jesus says, "Greater love has no one than this that he lay down his life for others." (John 15:13) And that is exactly what Jesus did by choice. He gave his life, so that we might know the depth, the height, and the width of God's love. So that we would know we are children of the Father. One part of our mission is to give children of all ages a place to know they belong. They belong to the Family of God and are somebody.

Not all of us are called to literally give our life, but some have and some are. Archbishop Oscar Romero was shot while serving communion in 1980 by rebel forces because he spoke up for the needs of the poor in El Salvador. The Salvadorean people caught in the crossfires of a war. Today, Christians are giving their lives for being Christian and while serving others. We remember those who have laid down their lives because of our common faith.

In a pastoral letter following the al-Shabaab attack on 2 April at Garrissa University, Kenya, that killed nearly 150 people, including many Christians. The primate of the Anglican Church of Kenya, Rev. Dr Eliud Wabukala, in his message for Good Friday called for unity in order to defeat the terrorist threat faced by the country and called on government to protect their citizens.

He said, "Let us covenant together before God that we will never ever surrender our nation or our faith in Christ to those who glory in death and destruction. We will not be

intimidated because we know and trust in the power of the cross, God's power to forgive our sins, to turn death into the gate of glory and to make us his children forever."ⁱⁱⁱ

Forever children of the Father that is what we are. Our sacrifice may be much easier because we do not live under the threat of persecution. We can give our time, our money, our skills, and our love. Now we have an opportunity to rebuild God's house so that others may know God's love and be like a child at home, so the needs of the hurting can find healing, so that the hungry and homeless can even find shelter, so that all God's children have a place. We can build a bridge to share God's love inside these walls and outside telling others, "You remind me of someone. Boy, you are a child of God. I see a striking resemblance. Now, you go on and claim your inheritance."

As we close in prayer, I share a favorite prayer of mine. It was written to commemorate the death of Archbishop Oscar Romero. As we step forward in faith together, bridging the generations at Fort Hill church, let's do our part of God's work. It's our time!

Let us pray...

ARCHBISHOP OSCAR ROMERO PRAYER: A STEP ALONG THE WAY

It helps, now and then, to step back and take a long view.

The kingdom is not only beyond our efforts, it is even beyond our vision.

We accomplish in our lifetime only a tiny fraction of the magnificent enterprise that is God's work. Nothing we do is complete, which is a way of saying that the Kingdom always lies beyond us.

No statement says all that could be said.

No prayer fully expresses our faith.

No confession brings perfection.

No pastoral visit brings wholeness.

No program accomplishes the Church's mission.

No set of goals and objectives includes everything.

This is what we are about.

We plant the seeds that one day will grow.

We water seeds already planted, knowing that they hold future promise.

We lay foundations that will need further development.

We provide yeast that produces far beyond our capabilities.

*We cannot do everything, and there is a sense of liberation in realizing that.
This enables us to do something, and to do it very well.
It may be incomplete, but it is a beginning, a step along the way, an
opportunity for the Lord's grace to enter and do the rest.
We may never see the end results, but that is the difference between the master
builder and the worker.
We are workers, not master builders; ministers, not messiahs.
We are prophets of a future not our own.^{iv}*

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ⁱ Fred Craddock, *Craddock Stories*, (St. Louis, MO: Chalice Press, 2001), 49.

ⁱⁱ 1 John 3:1

ⁱⁱⁱ <http://www.oikoumene.org/en/press-centre/news/anglican-church-of-kenya-calls-for-unity-to-defeat-terrorism>

^{iv} This prayer was composed by Bishop Ken Untener of Saginaw, drafted for a homily by Card. John Dearden in Nov. 1979 for a celebration of departed priests. As a reflection on the anniversary of the martyrdom of Bishop Romero, Bishop Untener included in a reflection book a passage titled "The mystery of the Romero Prayer." The mystery is that the words of the prayer are attributed to Oscar Romero, but they were never spoken by him.