

**Date :** 22 April 2018  
**Series :** Give Your Lives for Each Other  
**Preacher :** Revd Anders Litzell  
**Readings :** 1 John 3:16-24          Psalm 23          John 10:7-18

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Did you know that the word “Pastor” literally means “shepherd” it’s the latin word from which we also have the word pasture – the place where the pastor lets the sheep graze.

Jesus says “I am the good pastor; I know my own and j my own know me, just as the Father knows me and I know the Father; and I lay down my life for the sheep.

Now anyone who has ever been around sheep for any amount of time will know that sheep aren’t white and fluffy balls of delight who lie idly on green meadows with a brook trickling by – sheep are dirty and messy and if you try to pick one up, they kick and gore you!

Jesus’ experience of being a shepherd of His people was not a good one – his flock ended up killing him. But note what Jesus does in this passage – he refuses to blame the sheep. He says “I will lay down my life for the sheep”. He talks of the wolf coming and snatching the sheep and scattering the flock – but nothing in Jesus’ actual experience matches that because, as John says in the first chapter of his Gospel, “He came to His own, but His own did not receive Him.”

But Jesus refuses to mix the categories. He looks at us, at His sheep, with the eyes of the Holy Spirit that is sharp enough to separate, as St Paul says, even bone from marrow. That is, the Holy Spirit can show us a deeper reality than even the one we are looking at – the eternal reality, the heavenly perspective – and that helps us to see clearly in the present.

Jesus does not vilify the sheep – he mourns for Judas even before he betrays Him – woe to him, it would be better for him if he had never been born – and it is fair to say that Judas was a sheep who did the work of a wolf (I think that’s what Paul means when he talks about wolves in sheep’s clothing – sheep who do the work of a wolf).

Here is a little dashcam video from two German tourists who are driving – I think on holiday in Greece or somewhere thereabout – and come on a shepherd and his flock. I think this video is fairly indicative of Jesus’ experience of being a pastor.

[Shows a video of a shepherd taking his sheep across a road, and gets suddenly and viciously gored by one of the sheep.]

So here is a well-meaning oke, who is trying to take his sheep across the road to keep them from harm and maybe to find some better grazing – kind of exactly what a pastor should be doing, right? And in comes this ram who seems to think it his duty to deal with the threat called “the shepherd”.

Again, pretty much what happened to Jesus – the leaders of the land, both secular and religious leaders, agreed that this shepherd was a trouble-maker to be removed.

But Jesus does not equate our actions with our identity. If we do the work of the wolf; snatch, scatter and destroy, we remain sheep and Jesus never ceases to consider us his sheep, not even when we drive the nails into his hands as he prays “Father forgive them, because they don’t know what they are doing!”

And so Isaiah says:

I will give him a portion among the great,  
and he will divide the spoils with the strong,  
because he poured out his life unto death,  
and was numbered with the transgressors.  
For he bore the sin of many,  
and interceded for the sinners. (Isaiah 53:12)

Now for the twist. You know in every good story there is a twist – the turn when you think you know what's going on, and then you realise you didn't; or there is a different sub-plot running underneath the main narrative of the movie and now it's coming to the surface.

The twist is this: In the widest sense, we started this story as all being sheep with Jesus being our pastor or shepherd. That is still true, but the twist is that we are all now also pastors or shepherds.

This is because Jesus models human life for us – including laying down our lives for one another. 1 John elaborates this and says, essentially, “don't just die for each other; live for each other”.

We are all entrusted with two tasks: see to each other's well-being, to the point of causing ourselves serious discomfort (and the oke on the video knew ALL about discomfort after that one) and the second task is to see each other as sheep.

The enemy, Jesus says in the beginning who comes only to steal, kill, and destroy. But on the face of it, there are only sheep in this world! Yet Jesus says that others have come before Him purporting to be shepherds – but were not truly shepherds because they did not have the wellbeing of the sheep at heart. The poor shepherd in this video will get up, and somehow through his probable concussion, continue to make sure all the sheep are safe and fed – including that ram! That is shepherding!

And we each have the potential both for being sheep and being shepherds; that is what 1 John picks up on: [v16:] Jesus laid down his life for us – now you lay down your lives for each other! In the very next sentence it is clear that he is not talking about dying when he says 'lay down your lives', but about using our lives for the good of others at our own expense: [v 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?

Oh – ouch – it actually sounded easier in a sense when I thought he was talking about dying for one another because: a) that's not likely to happen today and b) I don't have to live with the consequences of my dying for someone else... but this sounds like ongoing sacrifice – this sounds like constantly discomforting myself for the wellbeing of others!

Do you remember Cain and Abel? That very first example of how deeply sin corrupts human life? Adam and Eve were the first to sin, and in the very first generation thereafter, two of sons, Cain and Abel, one becomes to bitterly hateful of the other that Cain kills Abel. And when God asks Cain about it – Cain answers, why is his life any concern of mine? Why is Cain's well-being something that should concern me?

Now this is the Kingdom secret: Jesus did not die to restore us to our pre-fall existence, so we can have another go at getting it right. Jesus did not die and rise again to undo the work of the enemy so we could start from scratch again to build human civilization or to discover what it is to be created in the image of God as if the fall had never happened; Jesus came to destroy the work of the enemy AND to reveal the maturity of the children of God, who have grown into our identity as the children of God and come into our birth right.

Jesus does not take our slate, full of our sin, wipe it clean and give us back a clean slate. Jesus takes our slate, and gives us His! Our slate is now written full with the fruit of a sinless life, a prayer life that is of the most intimate transparency with the Father, so that everything Jesus did, revealed the Father's heart! Our slate is written full with the wisdom of the Holy Spirit. Our slate is written full with the humility and obedience that has won Jesus a name above every name!

And on our slate is written also with the divine calling: “As the Father sent me, so I send you”. And as we take this slate of forgiveness and calling from Jesus' hands, He breathes on us and says “Receive Holy Spirit – now I am with you always – I am yours and you are mine!”

So we don't get a chance to do-over the Cain and Abel scenario – we are thrown straight into the fruit of Jesus' life; to care for those with whom we have nothing in common other than being created by the same Heavenly Father.

We are called to live for one another, to the point of discomfort.

Did you know that every month this congregation feeds 50 families around Westville? Families typically deeply afflicted by AIDS, lack of education, violence, and all manner of brokenness. I went the other week down to Cato Manor and met some of the mamas who distribute the food to the right people; deeply joyful people even though there was not a young woman among them, nor a single one in good health. But they carried the joy of Christ! Many of these families, as you all know, are headed by a grandmother, or an elder sibling, or an aunt because somewhere and somehow the family has suffered a loss of a parent or parents – and in the brokenness of life these old ladies – because as we all know the old ladies – give of what they do not have to feed and clothe children not their own.

This is what we give each family – 5kg of mielie meal, 2kg of beans, 750ml of cooking oil. Not even a hundred bucks' worth and it will keep a family, already afflicted from loss and illness, from starving. I think we used to give 10kg of mielie meal, but we cut it to 5 at some point in the past because we can only give what we receive.

Now mind you – pap will keep a family from starving, but it won't give children the energy or vitamins to learn and do well in school – and it falls short of enabling these families to flourish as human beings and children of God – and I pray to God one day soon we will do better – but for starters I want to make sure we keep doing what we ARE in fact doing!

I am fully convinced that we can – only we need to do it differently than we have been doing it. To date, some of you have been supporting this ministry very faithfully with collection envelopes or dedicated EFTs, and then the food gets bought in bulk, and that's fine, that can still happen – but I want to keep this front and centre in our awareness, that we are all that stand between some families and starvation.

When you come up today for Communion, can I encourage you to take one of these shopping lists – and pick some item from it to add to your weekly shop. We will have a collection box at the back of church every Sunday where we will gather the gifts from the congregation; mielie meal, beans and oil. Then at the time when we bring up the wine and bread and money collected, to pray for that, we will also bring up these gifts – to pray for each spoonful to go further than it should, and for the health of those who will eat it! And what we collect, is what we will distribute; it is as simple as that.

I want to pay tribute to the amazing team that has been taking this food around for so long Glen and Patty and company – and there are spaces on the team to help with this; because it is good to go two-by-two every time – and there are spaces on the team to help raise partnerships with local grocery stores or schools who may want to partner by having their students learn give to those who have nothing, or, or, or – come talk to me afterward if this catches your imagination!

This is a small thing, and a small way to begin to live for each other; but do let's begin in this way to involve all those for whom Jesus died in our lives – and please, as you pick up this shopping list, and as you pick up a packet of pap from the shelf – don't just buy it, every time you put something in the trolley, pray for those who will receive it, because you are their shepherd and you are providing their pasture in the name of Jesus!

Amen.