

# SUNDAY WORSHIP SERVICE

April 21, 2024

## WORDS OF WELCOME

### **INTROIT: "Sanctuary" (Sung 3 Times, Third time Acapella)**

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### **CALL TO WORSHIP: (PSALM 100)**

*L: Make a joyful noise to the Lord, all the earth.*

**C: Serve the Lord with gladness; come into his presence with singing.**

*L: Know that the Lord is God.*

**C: It is he who made us, and we are his; we are his people and the sheep of his pasture.**

*L: Enter his gates with thanksgiving and his courts with praise.*

*Give thanks to him; bless his name.*

**A: For the Lord is good; his steadfast love endures forever  
and his faithfulness to all generations.**

### **HYMN: "He Has Made Me Glad" (2 Times)**

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### **PRAYER FOR TRANSFORMATION & NEW LIFE: AΩ\***

*L: Shepherding Christ, even as you lay down your life for us,  
we confess our unwillingness at times to support the those in need.*

**All: More often than we care to admit, we can be the one who runs away in times of trouble. We aren't always bold enough to protect the powerless; following your example is rarely easy or comfortable.**

**Forgive us. Help us lay down our apathy and follow your example.**

**Remind us that we belong to one another, and to you. Amen.**

*Moment of Silence, In Confession, Listening to God &  
Reflection on God's Forgiveness, Love, Guidance, Redemption, and Restoration of our Lives*

### **WORDS OF GRACE:**

*L: God our Creator, Redeemer & Sustainer comes to us with grace, reminding us that God sent Jesus into the world, not for the purpose of condemning the world, but that the world might be saved through him, offering forgiveness and mercy, setting us free from past wrongs and with the help of the Holy Spirit empowers us to live life anew. Christ's birth, life, teachings death and resurrection gives life meaning and direction and the opportunity to start over;  
to rise up with Christ into new resurrection life.*

**A: We believe in the grace and peace of Christ. We are forgiven.**

**With the help of God, we will rise up into resurrection life  
and share it with others. Alleluia!**

### **HYMN OF ILLUMINATION: "Open Our Eyes, Lord"**

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## SCRIPTURE:

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### 1 John 3:16-24

<sup>16</sup> We know love by this, that he laid down his life for us—and we ought to lay down our lives for the brothers and sisters. <sup>17</sup> 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?

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

<sup>23</sup> 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. <sup>24</sup> 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

<sup>11</sup> “I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep. <sup>12</sup> 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. <sup>13</sup> The hired hand runs away because a hired hand does not care for the sheep. <sup>14</sup> I am the good shepherd. I know my own, and my own know me, <sup>15</sup> just as the Father knows me, and I know the Father. And I lay down my life for the sheep. <sup>16</sup> 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. <sup>17</sup> For this reason the Father loves me, because I lay down my life in order to take it up again. <sup>18</sup> 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.”

## A TIME OF REFLECTION:

Living into God’s Reality  
1 John 3:16-24      John 10:11-18

Sometimes in looking at a scripture lesson I find it helpful to look at a variety of versions. This week I found it helpful to read Eugene Peterson’s paraphrase version of 1 John in the Message Bible. It says:

*<sup>16-17</sup> This is how we’ve come to understand and experience love: Christ sacrificed his life for us. This is why we ought to live sacrificially for our fellow believers, and not just be out for ourselves. If you see some brother or sister in need and have the means to do something about it but turn a cold shoulder and do nothing, what happens to God’s love? It disappears. And you made it disappear.*

### **When We Practice Real Love**

*<sup>18-20</sup> My dear children, let’s not just talk about love; let’s practice real love. This is the only way we’ll know we’re living truly, living in God’s reality.”*

Now in 1 John it speaks of living sacrificially for fellow believers, but if we look at this in light of our Gospel reading today, we see that the “Good Shepherd not only cared about his flock but wanted to bring others into that flock as well. When Christ died on the cross, he died for the salvation of all. And when Christ prayed for himself and then for his disciples, he ended with praying for all who would come to believe in him through their witness. Clearly, living sacrificially is not only for fellow believers but for all who are suffering that they might come to know God and have abundant life also by experiencing God’s love for them and the other through us.

There are many ways to live sacrificially out of love sometimes literally laying down our life in order that others may have a better life or their suffering eased like that of those aid workers who lost their lives trying to get much needed food and supplies into Gaza. But, there is also laying down the comforts and desires of one's life in order to share God's love and provisions with another. When the seed of God's love is planted within us, it is not planted fully grown. Those seeds of God's love need nurturing and we need to allow ourselves, with the help of God, to continue to grow more fully into living in God's reality. It is only the beginning when we are willing to share what we have with our neighbor in need, remembering that Christ died for that person too. The apostle Stephen showed that sacrificial love for the other that while he was being stoned to death, he prayed the same prayer Jesus, prayed from the cross for those who were stoning him to death, for God to forgive them for they know not what they do, for he knew that Christ died for them too and would want them to be a part of his fold.

I don't know about you, but I often times find myself wrestling with myself over times I fail to act Christ-like. Like the Apostle Paul I cry out why do I do the things I don't want to do and don't do the things I want to do. I also wrestle with what is helpful and brings about new life and what in trying to be helpful enables an unhealthy situation to perpetuate itself. Carrie Doehring shares this insight. *"It is so easy in our day and age to become confused about what love is. Our confusion can lead us into thinking we are acting in a loving way by being self-sacrificing. By setting love and self-sacrifice within the context of resurrection, we can ask questions like, what new life will come out of our act of self-sacrifice? In what way will our actions hurt, limit or oppress ourselves or others? In this way we are describing a resurrection love—a love that brings life out of darkness and death, a love that seeks justice and healing."*

I now want to share with you a couple of modern-day examples life giving resurrection witnessing self-sacrificing love. The first one comes from a 2014 Global ministries update about 2 missionary *doctors serving at Christian Hospital Mungeli which is a small town in rural central India suffering from deep poverty and a chronic nursing shortage among the many other challenges facing the hospital.*

*Rather than a short-term fix, though it took years, the Henrys, with the help of many others opened a nursing school not only to address the nursing shortage, but also to provide much-needed economic opportunities for young women in this desperately-impoverished area, where only 8% of girls pass the 10<sup>th</sup> grade. This school became a reality in 2011 enrolling 19 students all from the area. In 2014 all 19 of those students graduated, passed their boards, and reported to work as paid nurses both easing the health crisis there and poverty issue as well.*

This is clearly an example where self-sacrifice was an act of love that brought about new life and witnessed to the power of the resurrection. They could have let the current reality overwhelm them, but instead they let the love of God that was planted within them guide their actions, a love that perseveres. By allowing themselves to be guided by their inner desire to live out their faith, not only did they alleviate some of the suffering from lack of skilled medical professionals but they also brought about new life in eliminating some of the poverty by training local people to carry out those jobs rather than just having short term missionaries take those jobs and then leave. This is a long-term solution to long-term problems.

These doctors didn't have to serve in an impoverished area but they willingly chose to serve among these people so that they too might come to experience the resurrection power of God's love because of the love that was planted within them. If you noticed I said served among them because it wasn't about serving them but walking alongside of a brother or sister in suffering.

The second example is from CWS helping in refugee camps from their March 5, 2024 post titled Penda Plants Seeds with Love. Throughout the world today there are so many displaced people. Tanzania is home to one of these refugee camps for those fleeing the violence of the Democratic Republic of Congo where the Nyarugusu refugee camp in Tanzania is home to 136,478 refugees. CWS has a vegetation program there that not only teaches people to garden in to help

eliminate the food shortages experienced in these camps, but they do so in a manner that allows for these refugees to pass on their knowledge to others that they may have food and so that they may also provide a sustainable living for their families from the excess produce helping to ease and/or eliminate the poverty in these refugee camps. Here again we see people living out God's sacrificial love in order that others may rise up into new life and pass it on just as they have received.

As we serve God as a gathered community and as individuals, may we too recognize that we are serving among God's people and may we recognize God at work not as us and them but as those for whom Christ prayed and died. By this we will know God's love. As we continue on with our daily lives may we allow the love of God that has been planted within us to continue to grow and guide all that we do. Good Shepherd, may that sacrificial love that you have planted within us be guided by your wisdom so that our self-sacrifice truly brings new life. Amen.

**HYMN OF RESPONSE: "They's Know We Are Christians By Our Love"**

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**A TIME OF PRAYER - LIFTING UP PRAYER REQUESTS - THE LORD'S PRAYER**

**INVITATION TO GENEROSITY:**

**PRAYER OF DEDICATION: AΩ\***

*L: Gracious God of the Resurrection,*

**A: We thank you for your gift of Jesus Christ, who cares for us, shepherds us and protects us. With these gifts we return to you, we ask that they be acceptable to you, and that you would bless them, multiply them and guide their uses so that they may be used to help us care for others in our communities and around the world; thus, making your love known and shown both near and far. Amen.**

**SUMM-IT UP:**

**SENDING HYMN: "Pass It On"**

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**CHARGE & BENEDECTION: AΩ\***

Today you have received the gift of Christ's protective, unceasing love for you. Because you are beloved, may all that you do and all that you are be a reflection of that love. Fight for the powerless, help the weak, and provide for the needy. Just as you have received, may you freely give. As you embrace both the joys and costs of discipleship, May the Lord bless and keep you. May the Lord make his face to shine upon you and be gracious unto you. May the Lord look upon you kindly and grant you the peace God alone can give.

**POSTLUDE: "Go Now In Peace"**

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