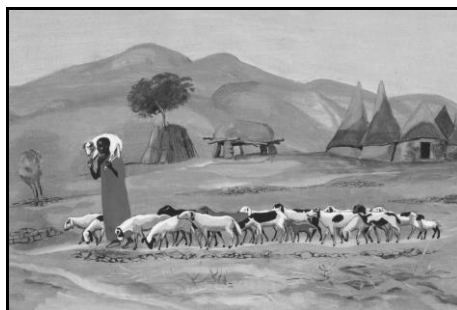


JESUS ON THE BORDER



Scripture:

Psalm 23

¹The LORD is my shepherd, I shall not want. ²He makes me lie down in green pastures; he leads me beside still waters; ³he restores my soul. He leads me in right paths for his name's sake.

⁴Even though I walk through the darkest valley, I fear no evil; for you are with me; your rod and your staff— they comfort me.

⁵You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies; you anoint my head with oil; my cup overflows. ⁶Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life, and I shall dwell in the house of the LORD my whole life long.

As I read this passage today, ponder how God is speaking to your soul
and inspiring you to action in some way for the future...

1 John 3:16-24

¹⁶We know love by this, that he laid down his life for us—and we ought to lay down our lives for one another. ¹⁷How 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?

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

²³And 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. ²⁴All 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.

This is the Word of the Lord! Thanks be to God!



We know love by this, that he laid down his life for us and we ought to lay down our lives for one another. Who is the “one another?”

It doesn't say for our friends, our closest relatives, our church family; this passage says we ought to lay down our lives for one another.

Then it goes on to say that God's love does not abide in someone who has resources and yet, when they see a brother or a sister in need they refuse to help them.

Isn't this a perfect lectionary passage for this Sunday since this is our “Blessing Bags” Sunday?

But this passage isn't just about giving out a blessing bag one time to someone who is homeless (even though that is a wonderful short-term blessing). This passage is about using your resources, gifts and talents and sharing them to help others over the long term. According to the apostle John, when we are not doing that, God's love is not abiding in us.

AGENTS FOR GOD'S LOVE

Our job (as Christ followers) should you choose to accept the assignment, is to be “not so secret agents” for God’s love in the world. And according to today’s passage, accepting the assignment is a risky mission. You are to be prepared to lay down your life for this mission! Whoa!

Christians aren’t allowed to be slouches. It is not a side hobby. It is your heart and soul assignment to love so much as to risk your life for others like a good shepherd does for his/her sheep.

Today’s reading of Psalm 23 reminds us how God is our Shepherd, carrying a rod to guide and a staff to protect, providing for our needs, walking with us in dark valleys, keeping us on the path of righteousness, and anointing us with so much love our cups overflow.

Then in today’s passage we are reminded that we all are called to be shepherds of God’s sheep. Peter was first reminded of this after Christ’s resurrection and appearance to the disciples in the upper room

PETER – SHEPHERD OF CHRIST’S SHEEP

Remember in John 21, when Jesus was redeeming Peter for denying him three times before his death? Jesus came to the disciples in the upper room again and to Peter he directly said, “Do you love me?” And Peter said, “Of course, I love you!”

Three times Jesus asked Peter, “Do you love me?” and after Peter replied yes each time, Jesus commanded him to “Feed my sheep and take care of my sheep.” He was forgiving Peter while also calling him to embrace his new role as shepherd of Christ’s sheep.

In Christ’s day, shepherds stood on the bottom rung of the Palestinian social ladder. They shared the same unenviable status as tax collectors and manure sweepers. Yet 100’s of years before, King David, who wrote Psalm 23, started out his career as a shepherd. And Remember, the angels first announced Christ’s birth to lowly shepherds. God appreciates shepherds.

Shepherds are a symbol of humble, brave and strong servants of God who care for the children of God. In John 10:11 it says, “I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for his sheep.”

MAASAI SHEPHERDS

Shepherds had to be willing to sacrifice themselves when they fought off predators who were after their sheep or cows. The painting on page one was done in Cameroon. But it reminds me of the Maasai shepherds that I got to know in Kenya when our church mission trip group spent a night in their village. The Maasai mara has many predators. So during the day the shepherds work in twos or threes and carry strong staffs with them while they herd their cattle around the grassy plain. The end of their long wooden staff has a huge round ball on the end so they can whack away predators like leopards, lions, black mambas or hyenas! These are some of the bravest people I have ever met! At night they close the gate of their village with a thorny bramble bush fence. I didn’t sleep a lot that night. It was quite the adventure and I gained a huge amount of respect for their ability to survive living the same way for hundreds of years.

WHAT DOES IT TAKE?

Ponder this...Do you have what it takes to be a shepherd of God’s sheep? What qualities would you say are important? What makes a good shepherd? Leadership skills? Protective? Empathy? Clear communicator? Brave? Humble? Tall? Able to withstand bad weather? Tough, resilient? Patient, Understanding? Being loving, compassionate, forgiving, and self-sacrificial? Those last four qualities, loving, compassionate, forgiving, and self-sacrificing, are the key characteristics of a good shepherd. And those last four qualities are what the 1st John passage was emphasizing.

If you want to know that God’s love is abiding in you, and be assured that the Holy Spirit is leading you, then you will know by the way your actions demonstrate God’s love to the world.

GOD DOESN'T SEE BORDERS

The truth in love is: God doesn’t see borders. Like the astronauts who orbit the earth often come back with a deep feeling of being of one family with

the earth's peoples, those who view the whole earth see no divisions or national lines drawn on the earth. They just see a fragile beautiful blue ball of mostly water and wonder why we are so divided when we all need to work together to save the planet. Yesterday was Earth Day.

When you show God's love to another human or animal or to the earth, you are fulfilling Jesus' command to love your neighbor as yourself. Then you know that God abides in you and you in God.

ISSUES ON THE BORDER

I just returned from spending a week with Mom who has lived twenty years just five miles from the Mexican border. While I was visiting I watched on TV and read the local newspapers in Mission and McAllen, Texas about the current issues on the border. We would be Mexicans right now if this year was between 1821 and 1848.

According to verse 18 of 1st John 3 it says we are to show "love in truth and in action." The truth is that the majority of the people on the United States' side of the border towns do not want a big wall. They want better immigration laws and a fair chance for their neighbors in Mexico to work in the US. Our agriculture industry badly needs them and the people in the Rio Grande see the people on the other side of the river as their friends.

Our US representative from the borderland Mission, Texas region was against the sending of National Guard troops to the border last week. He said their presence will create hostile tension in the region between the normal citizens and the soldiers. The local people on the United States side of border towns in Texas want the ability to freely move back and forth across the border like they used to when our relations with Mexico were positive. A wall will make it more difficult for US citizens to get into Mexico, too.

The congressman Gonzalez said, "I don't like the idea that when we're at a thirty-two-year low on crime in our anchor city of McAllen, and we're at a forty-two-year low of illegal border crossings, and still troops have been deployed to our southern border," Did you know illegal border crossings were at a forty-two-year low?

THE DRUG CARTELS

About ten years ago, the little Mexican towns of Reynosa and Progresso were bustling with American tourists who enjoyed the cheaper personal services, health and dental care and medicines. It was routine to make a fun trip across the border for a day whenever I would visit.

I remember looking at all the shops with artistic artifacts and jewelry and other items to buy, eating at authentic Mexican restaurants and practicing the little Spanish I know. Now the drug cartels have taken over Reynosa because the depressed tourist industry causes a huge deficit in employment. Sadly, the drug cartels always have a job for people.

On my last visit to Mom's region I learned that in the past few years the drug cartel has taken over the border and a wall will not stop the cartel. In fact, it will help them.

The cartel members bribe the border patrol and threaten to kidnap their family members if they hamper their ability to freely come and go across the border. A wall won't change this and neither will the presence of the National Guard. The cartel is too sneaky and powerful. A friend's uncle was kidnapped.

In fact, the drug cartel wants the wall built because that will funnel more South American refugees into their hands to use them for drug and human trafficking. More people are going to fall into the hands of the drug cartel if the wall is built because they are the only ones who will be able to manipulate their way across the checkpoints.

HARD WORKING FAMILY PEOPLE

Don Winslow, CNN editorial journalist, wrote an article titled *America's War on drugs is Empowering the Drug Cartels*. In 2016 he reported: "One of our presidential candidates recently said, speaking about immigration, that Mexico doesn't send us its best."

Winslow replied, "That is wrong. I know quite a few of the "undocumented" who have come over, and they are some of the finest, hardest-working, good family people that I have ever known. I'm proud to have them as neighbors."

Winslow also said, “The cartels control the profitable border territory.” If there is no other alternative, the people crossing will have to rely on the drug cartels which will enhance their business greatly. So the drug cartels are cheering for the wall to be built forcing people to rely more on them for passage.

WHAT WILL STOP THE DRUG CARTELS?

What will stop the drug cartel?

1. No more demand from the US for illegal drugs and
2. An easier legal process to become a legal immigrant.

The cartels lost a big chunk of their business when marijuana was legalized. So they have now turned their focus on illegal cocaine, meth and heroin. I don't understand how we can have something as toxic to the liver as alcohol legally for sale, but other pain relievers and sedatives are not legal to sell in a regulated way. Studies consistently show that when illegally sold drugs are classified as legal the mafia and drug cartel's power and wealth diminishes and the drug sales also go down. Then there are fewer prisoners to feed.

SHOW LOVE IN ACTION

1st John inspires us to tell the truth and show love in action.

I am so impressed by the way the nuns at Catholic Charities in Mission Texas show Christ's love in action as they provide shelter care for the children who come over the border without an adult. Some parents in El Salvador, Guatemala and Honduras are so petrified that their children will be captured and forced to be child soldiers that they send them north unaccompanied praying they will make it to safety and into the arms of some relatives on this side of the border. I knew a man from El Salvador who was a young fourteen year old when he was grabbed up with a young friend while they both sat on a curb waiting for a movie theatre to open. His mother didn't know what had happened to him for six months.

Can you imagine living in such a desperate circumstance that to save the life of your child you had to send them north to travel hundreds of miles on their own?

Monica Rhodes went to Texas and worked with some of these children a few years ago.

In 2014, fifty-nine-thousand children came unaccompanied to our border seeking refuge. Some were kept in cage-like enclosures.

LOVE ONE ANOTHER

Five times in the first letter of John he reminded the reader of Jesus' command to love one another. (1 John chapter 3:11, 23; chapter 4:7, 11, 12) He wanted to make sure that we understand that love is not an optional virtue for a believer. This kind of unconditional Love for stranger as well as neighbor is an essential ethic and distinguishing mark of a Christian in the world.

We know God's love in its essence because we are the direct recipients of it. This knowledge of how God's love works is based on the historical event of the crucifixion where Jesus “laid down his life for us.”

Jesus' death on the cross was a voluntary death and an epitome of love. Only by remembering his self-sacrifice on the cross can we truly understand the love of God. That is why we wear crosses around our necks and have them in churches. They are the symbol of Christ's deep sacrificial love for each of us.

Theological Professor Dr. David Allen says, “On the basis of Christ's death for us, John states emphatically that we are under moral obligation to love, if necessary, by laying down our lives for others as well.”

So those are your marching orders. Lay down your life for others.

I'm not asking you to die, but I am asking you to go and do for others something that you did not think you were capable of before! God will help you. Be a Good Shepherd! It can start with making blessing bags. Amen.

Benediction:

And may the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you now and forever more. Amen



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