

John 10:11-18

"I am the good shepherd*. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep. 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. The hired hand runs away because a hired hand does not care for the sheep. I am the good shepherd. I know my own and my own know me, just as the Father knows me and I know the Father. And I lay down my life for the sheep. 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. For this reason the Father loves me, because I lay down my life in order to take it up again. 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."

*The title pastor translates the same ancient Greek word used here for shepherd

During WWI, some Turkish soldiers tried to steal a flock of sheep from a hillside near Jerusalem. The shepherd, who had been sleeping, awoke to find his flock being driven off. He couldn't recapture them by force, so he called out to his flock with his distinctive call. The sheep listened, and returned to their rightful owner. The soldiers couldn't stop the sheep from returning to their shepherd's voice.

Too often this text, when translated "lays down his life for the sheep," means only "dies for the sheep." That's not what the word means here or where we saw it in today's reading from I John. Death isn't the main point. Life is.

The good shepherd's life is invested for the good of the sheep. If that means at some point the shepherd has to die, so be it. But the real test isn't death; the real test is ongoing, reliable support, day in, day out, good times and more challenging times. One wolf is not much of a threat for a decent shepherd. A good shepherd knows how to fight off the occasional wolf, and does so willingly, and if need be, regularly, as part of the job of caring for the sheep.

It's about a real investment of life for the good of the flock. And it's about real relationships with them, too, face to face, by voice and by name. There are no "generic sheep" in any good shepherd's fold. There are no "generic disciples" in the fold of Jesus. There is each one of us, called and known by Jesus by name. He lays his life on the line for us -- not just his death, but his life, then and now in the power of his resurrection by the Holy Spirit. His life invested for us, in us, that's his authority (verses 14-15).

COCU 34B. Easter 4B

Acts 4:5-12

The next day their rulers, elders, and scribes assembled in Jerusalem, with Annas the high priest, Caiaphas, John,* and Alexander, and all who were of the high-priestly family. When they had made the prisoners* stand in their midst, they inquired, 'By what power or by what name did you do this?' Then Peter, filled with the Holy Spirit, said to them, 'Rulers of the people and elders, if we are questioned today because of a good deed done to someone who was sick and are asked how this man has been healed, let it be known to all of you, and to all the people of Israel, that this man is standing before you in good health by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth,* whom you crucified, whom God raised from the dead. This Jesus* is "the stone that was rejected by you, the builders; it has become the cornerstone."*

There is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among mortals by which we must be saved."



(Photo: 'Knitting Nannas Against Gas' at their weekly 'knit in' outside the National Party's office to protest CSG development. Police have issued a warning that to sit and knit outside the National Party's office could be illegal. Aidan Ricketts, a lecturer in Southern Cross University's Law and Justice school and activism expert, said claims the Nannas' protest was illegal were wrong, and that there was

"no such thing" as an illegal protest under Australian law. "Groups only need to apply for permission to hold an event that will obstruct people or traffic. The Nannas do not block the footpath outside the office so they cannot be charged with obstruction".

The direct public confrontation of Christian faith with cultural authority is often downplayed or dissuaded by cultural, political and Christian leadership alike. But it was exactly this that fuelled the abolition movement, the labor movement, the temperance movement, the women's rights movement, the Confessing movement in Nazi Germany, the civil rights movement, and the movements that led to the tearing down of the Berlin Wall and dismantling of Apartheid in South Africa. Such movements were on the offensive, not the defensive. And they held the intellectually rigorous high ground, not content to retreat into mere tradition or to act as the defenders of the positions that had legitimized the powers that be. These are disciples of Jesus Christ transforming the world!

Shepherd Me, O God

Words by Marty Haugen.

*Shepherd me, O God, beyond my wants,
beyond my fears, from death into life*

God is my shepherd, so nothing shall I want,
I rest in the meadows of faithfulness and love,
I walk by the quiet waters of peace.

Gently you raise me and heal my weary soul,
You lead me by pathways of righteousness and truth,
my spirit shall sing the music of your name.

Though I should wander the valley of death,
I fear no evil, for you are at my side,
your rod and your staff, my comfort and my hope.

You have set me a banquet of love, in the face of hatred,
crowning me with love beyond my pow'r to hold.

Surely your kindness and mercy follow me all the days of my life;
I will dwell in the house of my God forever-more.

1 John 3:16-24

We know love by this, that he laid down his life for us - and we ought to lay down our lives for one another. 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? Little children, let us love, not in word or speech, but in truth and action. And by this we will know that we are from the truth and will reassure our hearts before him whenever our hearts condemn us; for God is greater than our hearts, and he knows everything. Beloved, if our hearts do not condemn us, we have boldness before God; and we receive from him whatever we ask, because we obey his commandments and do what pleases him. 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. 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.



For those whom we have asked to bear the horror of our violence we offer our prayers of thanks:

for their willingness to stand between us and our fears, for forgiveness for having asked them, of healing for the damage to their souls by what they have done and seen, for mercy for them who don't know how to carry the horror back to us, or how to shed the darkness we have asked them to drink, or how to live among us, who are so willing to sacrifice our children. May we give others peace to bear, not fear; healing to carry, not weapons; and send them into blessing, not danger.

May we, too, have the courage to serve, to risk, to give our lives in love for the sake of our homeland - which is the Reign of God - and the whole human family, in the spirit of peace. Amen. *Steve Garnaas-Holmes*