



on Sermon 22 April 2018 'Love is the Link'
1 John 3:16-24 John 10:11-18

Prayer: Loving Lord, hold us close and care for us each day, just like a good shepherd. Lead us, guide us, challenge us, so that we might commit to being a more faithful community that follows you. Amen. **off**

Love is the Link is the theme today and I'm sharing a few ways this can work for us this morning.

1. John's Gospel is a rich source for reflection, and today we get to look at the Jesus, Good Shepherd (*in a bit*), for now the link is in the verses where Jesus talks about **laying down his life**. 1 John passage started at v16 'This is how we **know what love is**: Jesus Christ laid down his life for us.'

The writer is defining that for him this is what 'love' is all about. **on** It's not some pretty 'song and dance routine in a Disney movie' or a gooey-eyed, perfectly blonde Jesus in pure white robes...

Love is real, honest, a raw truth that dies – literally for the 'other'. It's messy, stark, and **absolutely what Jesus was about**. Love links our two scriptures this morning.



In John's Gospel Jesus uses the Good Shepherd metaphor to *explain* his ministry and life mission. His original listeners would have linked his words with their scriptures where the same ^{1*}metaphor is used to speak about YHWH-God. Eg. Ezekiel 34:11–31 or probably the most famous one, our psalm for today: Psalm 23. By using this metaphor Jesus is claiming to be one with God and to be doing God's work. **off**

In John's Gospel this week, ^{2*}Jesus twice says, "I am the good shepherd." **on** "**I am**" is ego eimi, the divine name in Greek. John's gospel is the one with the seven "I am" sayings. At different points, Jesus says "I am": 'the bread of life' (6:35), "the light of the world" (8:12), "the gate" (10:9), "the good shepherd" (10:11, 14), "the resurrection and the life" (11:25), "the way, the truth, and the life" (14:6), and "the true vine" (15:1). **Remember John likes** the number seven. Seven is said to be the number of completion and wholeness. In addition to seven "I am" sayings this gospel also has seven pre-resurrection "signs". (The 7 days of re-creating Creation...) So the seven "signs" and seven "I am" sayings are to give us a **complete view** of the ministry and identity of Jesus *according to John*. **off**

... I am the good shepherd ...

Before we leave the language of maths behind this morning Petty shares that "The fourth point is sometimes regarded **as central**. When we count four from either end of a line of seven dots and we arrive at the "central point". The fourth "I am" saying is "**I am the good shepherd**." For the fourth gospel, this is at the **heart** of the divine identity of Jesus. Just so we don't miss the point, *Jesus says it twice*.

I am the Good Shepherd Jesus said. In his day, *his listeners* and most of his followers came from the countryside, so everyone already knew how the important the work of a shepherd was. It is a strong and rich image for them. ^{1*}The good shepherd **cares** for and **protects** the flock, **returns** lost sheep to the fold, and **feeds** the flock. The good shepherd puts the **well-being** of the flock ahead of everything else, **even** the shepherd's own life.

Moreover, ^{3*}the shepherd was a common image used for rulers, from *ancient Egypt* to Israel. It reflected both versatile strength and nurture. It was an image of engaged leadership.' Remember how they tell of how their ideal king, David, was once a shepherd? So Jesus is completely within his traditions when he uses an ordinary subject; a part of everyday life, to enable his listeners to relate life as they knew it with **what** Jesus-Messiah is **like** and **what** faith in Him might **involve**, for *his followers*.

After Jesus claims the Good Shepherd position for himself, and teaches about what ^{1*}"the good shepherd will do, he then moves to what the shepherd **will not do**. Jesus contrasts the good shepherd with a hired hand, who does not have ultimate commitment to or covenant with the sheep." ie bad leaders (Ezekiel) / rulers / authorities whether secular (The Romans) or religious (Temple including the Sadducees / Pharisees) ... This metaphor still has life when applied to leadership models experienced today.



But keeping the focus for today, *a little before* our verses ^{on} Jesus taught about how he was a 'gate for the sheep', and now he expands this teaching 'about the sheep in the shepherd's charge. The good shepherd^{1*} opens up the "pen" – the place of relationship with the shepherd, where sheep receive care and protection – to all who respond to Jesus' voice.' If we *find* comfort in this for ourselves, for we have come into relationship with him, then so must have our faith ancestor's ever since his original teaching. We belong, are provided for, claimed **and loved!** ^{off}

2. Love is why Jesus can do what he does – for all 'others'. Love, **because** God loves him → he loves: lives, acts, speaks, does what he chooses to do – **all for love**. I invite you to explore John's verses later: '17 The reason my Father loves me is that I lay down my life—only to take it up again. 18 No one takes it from me, but I lay it down of my own accord. I have authority to lay it down and authority to take it up again. This command I received from my Father.'

The love between God and Jesus allows freedom of thought and action. These two parts of the Trinity have distinctions in their oneness, allowed by love. And love is the link between them.

Earlier I said that today we had a definition of what 'love' is all about. ^{on} It's not some pretty Disney song or perfectly blonde Jesus... It's real, honest, a truth that love **dies** – literally for the 'other'. It's messy, lonely, and **absolutely what Jesus was about**. ^{4*} Immediately before describing the hired hand who **quickly abandons** his charges (*it's just a job, after all*), Jesus speaks of thieves, bandits, strangers and wolves, **and** the violence **and** risk those images convey. ^{2*} But by vs 11-18, Jesus has switched from "thieves" / "robbers" to the "hired hand". The hired hand who gets scared in the face of danger--the wolf--and then abandons the sheep, allowing the wolf to scatter and attack them. The actions of the hired hand **are not love**, especially not love **for the 'other'**, love that lays down one's life for that 'other'. Jesus is not a hired hand: he lays down his life; he is God; & he is the love that **gives life** to all others. ^{off}



3. Love is the basis of the bond between Jesus and his disciples – including us – in our times and cultures. John writes of this in many places in his Gospel, it is a fundamental in his Christology that God-Jesus love is what Jesus-disciple love is about. John 15:9-17 (NIV) 9 "As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you. Now remain in my love. 10 If you keep my commands, you will remain in my love, just as I have kept my Father's commands and remain in his love."

Today in 1 John 3 we heard how we belong because our hearts are at rest in his presence – and if our feelings (heart worries) feelings try to block our heart's rest –^{3*} then God is greater, sees what is really the case. Our job is to look to, to trust God **with** our troubled minds, despite what we feel! It is this trusting God and not our feelings that enable us to be confident in relating to God. Love creates a group of people who are free and able to be them-selves when in God's presence. ^{3*} Loader explains it this way: "c3:22 then picks up the widely cited saying about being heard when we ask for things. It is always a problem if transferred into a consumer society: **I will get what I want!** In fact the author clearly sees it **in the context** of what happens with shared wills. We get what we need **when** we engage in the life of God and are doing God's commandments. It is a way of affirming the sufficiency of God and God's love."

4. Love is the link in 1 John between the disciple / us **and the 'other'**. **The** other's that are not in our pen (Jn 10:16), our brothers and sisters (1 Jn 3:17) "17 If anyone has material possessions and sees a brother or sister in need but has no pity on them, how can the love of God be in that person?" What we **do** and say, how we live and act **for all others**, is based on being the love of God for them.



This week ^{on} I came across this ^{5*} story: [Jesus] has a way of sneaking into the awareness and experience of people who never saw a Bible. After Sadhu Sundar Singh (1889-1929) had preached about Jesus in an Indian village, an old Hindu told him, "I have known him all my life, and now you have told me his name." ^{off}



Who is 'other' for you? What will it cost for you to love the other, ^{on} the stranger, **as you are loved?**

⁴*Jonathan Sacks, chief rabbi of Great Britain, tells us that 'the Hebrew Bible in one verse commands, "You shall love your neighbour as yourself," but in no fewer than 36 places commands us to "love the stranger."''' Can we do love like this? Amen ^{off}