

WWJD: Sacrifice
John 1:14-17
Sunday, January 25, 2026

So, I'll just tell you up front, I don't want to do this sermon. Today, I'm supposed to talk about how following Jesus involves sacrifice. And I'm guessing you want to hear about sacrifice about as much as I want to preach about it. Especially right after Christmas. I mean, that was so great, wasn't it. The kids and the candle light. The warmth. The peace. The little baby wrapped up tight in the manger. It's a lot more comfortable to talk about that stuff than to talk about sacrifice.

Now, of course, we recognize the value of sacrifice, and we appreciate it. So, we talk about sacrifice on days like Martin Luther King day, Memorial day and Veteran's day, remembering the sacrifice so many have made for us. We appreciate the sacrifice of firefighters, police, and others who are in public service. In just a few months, we'll be remembering Good Friday, the day of Jesus' supreme sacrifice for us. When we look to our faith, we appreciate the sacrifice so often made by ministers who could easily be doing something else, and especially missionaries, who have dedicated their lives entirely to serving God and others.

But, for the most part, we think of those kinds of people as special cases; kind of like superheroes. We'd just as soon not think about whether sacrifice ought to be a part of our lives. But I'm going to go there, so please stick with me.

Now, as I mentioned, we just celebrated Christmas. And if you were paying attention during the Christmas Eve service, you will have noticed that among all the different scripture readings, none were from the Gospel of John. That's because his Gospel doesn't start with

Jesus' human birth. It goes way, way, way further back ... to the very beginning. That's what we see in this scripture. We see what and who Jesus was before he was Jesus: the Word. The second person of the Holy Trinity. And then John gives us his birth narrative ... more of a summary really, the Word became flesh and dwelt among us. The second person of the Holy Trinity entered into time and space and became a human being named Jesus.

If you remember back several weeks when we started this sermon series on "What Would Jesus Do," I mentioned this scripture in the context of talking about Jesus' humility. How Paul, in his letter to the Philippians, characterized the Word becoming flesh as Jesus "emptying" himself, leaving the boundlessness of eternity to enter into the narrow constraints of time and space and the even narrower limitations of becoming a human being, subject to all the things we human beings are subject to. All because of God's love for humanity.

Not only does this act demonstrate humility, it was also a sacrifice. A sacrifice the scope of which we, from our narrowly constrained viewpoint *as* human beings in time and space, cannot even imagine.

But that was only the first of many sacrifices Jesus made for our sake. For instance, instead of being born into wealth, comfort, and power, he was born into a working-class family in an obscure Jewish village.

Instead of continuing with his trade, which would have at least enabled him to make a living for himself, at about 30 he adopted a life of itinerant ministry, making him dependent on others for all of his needs.

By the way, this choice also meant he wasn't able to get married and settle down with a family, something on which his culture placed a very high value.

In doing these things, and in so many other ways, Jesus made the sacrifice of giving up control of his life, and giving that control to his Father. He went where the Father said and did what the Father told him to do.

His time was not his own. There's a story in the Gospels of Matthew, Mark, and Luke about a man named Jairus who asks Jesus to save his sick daughter. On the way to Jairus' house, a woman who had been bleeding for 12 years touches his cloak and is healed. Instead of continuing to hurry to Jairus' house, Jesus stops and talks to this unclean, outcast woman. He sacrificed his own agenda for the needs of the moment.

Jesus sacrificed significant time to spiritual practices, like prayer. The Gospels record several instances of Jesus praying all night. For instance, in Luke's Gospel Jesus prays all night before choosing the 12 apostles.

Jesus sacrificed the goodwill of the rich and powerful by speaking truth to power. In Luke's Gospel, after telling the poor, hungry, and sad how they are blessed in the kingdom of heaven, he goes on to say, "woe to you who are rich, for you have received your consolation. Woe to you who are full now, for you will be hungry. Woe to you who are laughing now, for you will mourn and weep. Woe to you when all speak well of you, for that is what their ancestors did to the false prophets." (Luke 6:20-26). Needless to say, that didn't endear Jesus to those folks.

And, of course, there's the ultimate sacrifice. His horrible torture and his long, slow, painful death on a cross.

But here's the thing. We have no indication from the scripture that Jesus struggled with any of these things. Well, that isn't quite true. He did struggle in the garden of Gethsemane with his death. But in the end, he said to the Father, "not my will, but yours be done," and went peacefully to the cross. Other than that once instance, it doesn't seem as if he regretted any of the sacrifices he made in his life. It doesn't seem as if, in the moment, he was thinking to himself, "What was I thinking?," or "I wish I hadn't done all this." All that sacrifice wasn't something above and beyond who he might have been. It was simply part of who he was. It was the living out of his identity as the embodiment of divine love.

And Jesus invites us to live out that same identity. As we talked about a few weeks ago, God is love, Jesus is the image of God or, in the words of today's scripture, "¹⁸ No one has ever seen God. It is the only Son, himself God, who ^[f] is close to the Father's heart, ^[g] who has made him known." Jesus and his life are the image of how we were created to live. When we live as he did, we live into our true identity.

Maybe the best expression of this is the Message translation of what Jesus tells the crowds about what it means to follow him. He asks, "Are you tired? Worn out? Burned out on religion? Come to me. Get away with me and you'll recover your life. I'll show you how to take a real rest. Walk with me and work with me—watch how I do it. *Learn the unforced rhythms of grace.* I won't lay anything heavy or ill-fitting on you. Keep company with me and you'll learn to live freely and lightly." (Matthew 11:28-30 MSG). In other words, Jesus is saying, "All this that

I'm doing, it's the unforced rhythm of grace; the unforced rhythm of living in connection with God ... and it's available to you." It's what Jesus describes elsewhere as bountiful, abundant, eternal life.

And it's available to us. But that new kind of life does involve sacrifice. It's just part of the deal. Jesus did say, after all, that in addition to experiencing the unforced rhythms of grace—or more accurately, as an integral part of it—we must pick up our crosses and deny ourselves. So, what kind of sacrifice is Jesus talking about?

And this brings us back to the title of our sermon series, What Would Jesus Do? Or, as we talked about last week, "What DID Jesus do?"

He lived out of step with the culture around him. As he did, we live in a world that worships power, status, and money; a world where, increasingly it seems, might makes right; a world of racism, nationalism, and rampant discrimination; a world of arrogance and judgment.

And so, just as Jesus was condemned for preaching and living love in the midst of all that selfishness and hate, we must be prepared to do the same. We must be prepared for the world to look at us as naïve, out of step, and just plain weird.

As Jesus did, we've got to be prepared to put our time, our attention, our talents, and our resources at God's disposal; to not give God whatever we have left over when we're done living our "real" lives, but to give Him the first and the best of ourselves; to be truly *present* to those around us, rather than consumed with our own to-do lists and agendas.

We've got to do what it takes to get closer to God by setting aside intentional time to be WITH God through spiritual practices like regular worship, study, prayer, service, and giving.

We've got to be prepared to get out of our comfort zones in our effort to share God's love with everyone, even the people we might not otherwise associate with.

But here's the thing. In doing these things, we imitate Christ. And, in imitating Christ, we are drawing closer to God. And, in drawing closer to God, we begin to experience those unforced rhythms of grace that Jesus promised. We begin to live into the kinds of lives we were created to live. We begin to experience that *real* life that Jesus described as eternal. And what once looked like a sacrifice simply becomes part of the lifegiving rhythm of our lives.