

## 2023.04.30 Scripture and Sermon

### Prayer of Illumination:

Guide us, O God, by your Word, and Holy Spirit, that in your light we may see light, in your truth find freedom, and in your will discover peace, through Christ our Lord, **Amen.**

### SCRIPTURE First Reading: John 10:11-17 (*NRSV, adapted*)

"I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down their 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 God knows me and I know God. 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 Holy One loves me, because I lay down my life in order to take it up again."

*This is the Word of the Lord*

*Thanks be to God.*

### SCRIPTURE Second Reading: 1 John 3:16-18, 23-24 (*NRSV, adapted*)

We know love by this, that Christ 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 another in need and yet refuses help?

Little children, let us love, not in word or speech, but in truth and action. This is God's commandment, that we should believe in the name Jesus and love one another, just as Christ 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.

*This is the Word of the Lord*

*Thanks be to God!*

## “Imagine a Love”

Guide us, O God, by your Word, and Holy Spirit, that in your light we may see light, in your truth find freedom, and in your will discover peace, through Christ our Lord, **Amen**.

Do you remember being a child and having that child-like wonder and love for everything and everyone around you? Last week while on vacation, my six-year-old Granddaughter Ember reminded me of what it is like to love like a child. She LOVED everything about our weekend together. From doing a cool and damp color run, to a tie-dyeing art project, watching her silly movies and having great belly laughs over the characters and those sweet hugs and kisses, we had it all, our time was hemmed in love. Ember's passion for the weekend visit reminded me of what God expects of us. A child-like love for all. God even calls us children. John refers to us, the audience, as "children" in this "epistle/ letter" of 1st John, reminding us that God wants us to have child-like imagination.

Our 1st John text begins with love that can only be imagined. The life, death, and rebirth of Christ is the center of this imagined love. Imagine a love so great that Christ gave his life because of that type of incredible self-sacrificing love.

Our second scripture is from the Gospel of John, and it begins with Jesus saying, "I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down their life for the sheep."

- How great is the love that our Creator has lavished on us?  
How do we even understand this love that our creator God has for us?
- WE can only imagine that God's Love Is **Unbounded**; it is endless.
- We can only imagine **unlimited** love. The Psalmist tells us, "Surely goodness and love will follow me ALL THE DAYS OF MY LIFE, and I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever." (Psalm 23:6)
- WE can only imagine a love that is **unconditional** Moses said, "...The Lord, the Lord, the compassionate and gracious God, slow to anger, abounding in love and faithfulness, maintaining love to thousands [innumerable], and forgiving wickedness, rebellion, and sin..." (Exodus 34:6-7)
- We can only Imagine an unchangeable love that never **Changes**; we do not encounter that type of love in us. God says, "I am the same today Yesterday and forever and behold I change not."

Right now, it is hard to imagine the love our scripture writer is talking about. We are living in a strange land, strange times that is ruled by fear of others. We live in a world of strained relationships, where lines are drawn, and only the people on your side of the line are allowed into a relationship and to be loved. We worry so much about those people on the other side of the line, and we forget that God command, "Little children, let us love, not in word or speech, but truth and action. This is God's commandment that we should

believe in the name Jesus and love one another, just as Christ has commanded us. You see each and everyone in the world contains the essence of God. God has created each of us with a bit of God inside.

How does God's love abide in anyone who has the world's goods and sees another in need and yet refuses help? So, if you are feeling like it is hard to love others, I encourage you to tap inside of yourself and find the God essence inside (it's there) and imagine a God like love.

I think the key is in imagination! A Child-like imagination! Imagine God's Lavish Love for all, a dance of love! We hear in the gospel of John Jesus said, "I have other sheep that do not belong to this fold. I must bring them also, and they will listen to my voice." Let me read that again Jesus said, "I have other sheep that do not belong to this fold. I must bring them also, and they will listen to my voice." I wonder if our own self-centered understanding of God, the voices of the evangelical churches desire that everyone must be saved through Christ and our own incomplete exploration of the scripture and limited time in prayer has created a misunderstanding. God expects that all will be part of ONE community, yet different types of sheep. What could the John Knox community do that would show God's lavish love for all? What would this **lavish** dance look like? I think our free pancake breakfasts are a way to show **lavish** and **unlimited** love to our neighbors. Our food pantry brothers and sisters. Those who may or may not have less than we do.

Where does the world need to see **unbounded** love? How many of you have watched a creek that expand out of its banks when heavy rains arrived? A few years again we rented a cabin for Spring break in Brown Country, IN. And of course, it rained, and rained and rained. A small creek ran just behind the cabin, and we watched the creek change. It begins with a fast, muddy stream that felt so unbounded; the creek bed was simply a suggestion for where it flowed for our first few days. As the weather improved and things dried up, the creek returned to flowing between its banks. The thing about unbounded creeks is that it nourishes the plants and animals along the way, much like unbounded Love of God. A dance of unbounded, flowing nourishment, tending the souls of those so thirsty for love. Where is it that God's unbounded loves needs to be extended?

God's love is also **unlimited**, not restricted to just a few; it is for all. And it will be with us all the days of our lives, I imagine if we **really** believed that then things would change. What courage could come from unlimited love? If we thought we had enough for all, where could we risk loving? Everything around us, especially in these strange times, seems to suggest limited resources and we must fight for what is ours and keep it from the other side. **Imagine** if we believed that God's resources were to be shared with all and we could dance without restriction, with this knowledge that there is enough for everyone. What would happen if we, the church, imagined an unconditional love, a love that was not based on what we did or didn't do, who we were, what the color of our skin was, just there unconditionally for everyone. Can you imagine what

our community looks like if we adopted an understanding of God's unconditional love was just that? Where would this unconditional love take us? Perhaps fill out our front yard with gardens of produce for everyone to take as they needed. Our feeding our neighbors more than once a month or maybe building a community center our grass spare lot that holds the food pantry, social workers, legal aid, English as a second language, have soccer camps and afterschool care, just imagine that!

And how would our strange land and strange time react if we could teach them that God's Love was **unchanging**! That in the future, God would love everyone just as God has loved everyone in the past. Can you imagine the freedom that would come with this understanding? What a joy-filled dance that would be!

What if the dance we danced showed **God's Love to everyone**. Can you imagine what might happen if we could dance that dance? I believe that is what God expects of us. And that we must keep practicing this dance and remind ourselves to love like God loves us. Lavish love, unlimited, unbounded, unconditional, and unchanging! AMEN