

How many of you remember reading the O Henry short story, The Gift of the Magi where Della and Jim both sacrifice deeply to purchase a Christmas gift fit for the loves of their lives. Do you remember that moment when it was clear that Jim was not sad that his wife hair had been cut but that in her sacrifice his gift was of little value? Or how it dawned on Della when she realized that her Jim had sacrificed his watch in order to gift her the combs? Jim & Della loved each other so and had worked hard to show their love through a beautiful gift. I remember the heart ache when reading it in high school but also quiet admiration for the willing to sacrifice what they loved in order to shower their beloved. How many of us have worked hard to purchase a gift for one we loved? I've been the giver and receiver of such gifts. It was easier to make the sacrifice for me, than to receive such a costly gift.

I wonder what we are willing to sacrifice for love? Love of Country – we can look to Casablanca, Les Miserables, Braveheart or Hamilton to see the ways in which people willingly sacrifice to make their country better for others. Love of Family we only have to look at It's a Wonderful Life to see sacrifice. Love for Humanity we see sacrificial love in the stories of Schindler's List, Amazing Grace and the Bells of St Mary. I'm sure we could keep naming movies that demonstrated sacrificial love. We could look at children's tales to see more examples from the classic Pinocchio and Beauty and the Beast to the modern Wreck it Ralph and Big Hero 6.

As we hit the middle point of the season of Easter we hear a familiar text. Familiar, not just in that we know the story but because we read it exactly 2 months ago during our Lenten Series

of the I Am statements of Jesus. I almost skipped over it but upon reading it again, this side of the cross and the promise of the Good Shepherd felt different. We listened to these same words and the 23rd Psalm to find rest and restoration in the words as we were cared for by the Good Shepherd. It was life giving and perfect tonic after the Winter Storm that left us with ice and frozen pipes and more mess. When we hear these same words our experiences bear out something different. It's nearly May, the flowers are blooming and the weather is warming. We long to walk barefoot in the soft grass and watch as the birds migrate.

We've spent these last 3 Sundays see that the Disciples just did not get it and Jesus just kept showing up, announcing peace and sending them out to practice forgiveness. What does it mean for us to sacrifice in light of the cross? What are we willing to give up for love of others? What do our actions say about our commitment to the Gospel?

We don't like to talk about sacrifice. These same words of Jesus in Lent seemed to offer healing but on this side of the cross seems constraining. Jesus' promise as the Good Shepherd who sacrificed his life to protect us is now calling us to do the same. Our Gospel reading this day is a reminder, that before the cross, Jesus gave us the new commandment, to love our neighbor as ourselves. We are called to deny our wants for the well-being of others.

Our Epistle reading from 1 John continues on this understanding of sacrifice because we know the depth of the love of God as "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.” That’s a lot to take in all at once.

We begin with knowing that God loves us. The depth of God’s love is not only known on the cross but in the incarnation. God gave up everything. It is in the limiting of God’s self to come and live an earthly life. God sacrificed the creature comforts of a divine being to have the human experience with hunger, sore feet and being rejected by those who loved him. We fail to understand the depth of God’s love if we only think of the sacrifice of God as on the cross. Jesus’ entire earthly life was filled with one sacrifice after another, after another. It’s all too easy to compartmentalize the sacrifice to Good Friday. Think of the anguish Jesus had when he flipped over the tables at the temple? Or the frustration with religious leaders, who he was constantly at odds with? What about when the disciples did not get it? It was certainly not easy for Jesus, as the Son of God. And yet, Jesus knows what it is to ask this of us with the promise that Jesus is with us in this calling.

So what do we do with the love of God? We have to use it. That means we have to sacrifice. We are called to put our love in action. It is our love for God, our love of God and our love of others. This love is not selfish but sacrificial. It’s giving up our freedom for other’s lives. It’s in giving up our hair so that another may know the depth of our love for them. It is in sharing out of our abundance to those who do not have enough. It is this kind of living and love that transform our world into the kingdom of God. This is holy calling and one that all disciples are called to do. And yet, we like our comfort too much. Our challenge this week

especially is to find ways to put our love of God and neighbor in actions. In the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. Amen.