

SHEEP IN SHEPHERD'S CLOTHING
FOURTH SUNDAY OF EASTER

1 JN 3:16-24
APR 26, 2015

¹⁶ By this we know love, that he laid down his life for us, and we ought to lay down our lives for the brothers. ¹⁷ But if anyone has the world's goods and sees his brother in need, yet closes his heart against him, how does God's love abide in him? ¹⁸ Little children, let us not love in word or talk but in deed and in truth.

¹⁹ By this we shall know that we are of the truth and reassure our heart before him; ²⁰ for whenever our heart condemns us, God is greater than our heart, and he knows everything. ²¹ Beloved, if our heart does not condemn us, we have confidence before God; ²² and whatever we ask we receive from him, because we keep his commandments and do what pleases him. ²³ And this is his commandment, that we believe in the name of his Son Jesus Christ and love one another, just as he has commanded us. ²⁴ Whoever keeps his commandments abides in him, and he in them. And by this we know that he abides in us, by the Spirit whom he has given us.

What do sheep look like? They are all covered in thick wool.

So if you take animal and cover it in thick wool, is it a sheep?

No, it may be a wolf in sheep's clothing.

It is not a sheep because it is covered in wool,

it is covered in wool because it is a sheep.

In these verses, John describes what Jesus' sheep look like,
they do loving deeds.

So, does doing loving deeds make us Jesus' sheep?

No, being Jesus sheep makes us do loving deeds.

So, what is it that makes us Jesus' sheep?

It is being dressed in the shepherd's clothing,

being covered with righteousness of Christ through faith.

In these verses, John mentions three things we can know
because we learn them from God:

WE LEARN LOVE FOR OTHERS FROM JESUS
WE LEARN TO SHOW LOVE FROM GOD'S ASSURANCE
WE LEARN CONFIDENCE IN GOD FROM HIS SPIRIT

WE LEARN LOVE FOR OTHERS FROM JESUS

¹⁶ By this we know love, that he laid down his life for us, and we ought to lay down our lives for the brothers. ¹⁷ But if anyone has the world's goods and sees his brother in need, yet closes his heart against

him, how does God's love abide in him? ¹⁸ Little children, let us not love in word or talk but in deed and in truth.

When a romantic song comes on the radio,
a husband sings along to his wife:
I would walk 100 miles for you,
I would climb the highest mountain for you,
I would swim the deepest ocean for you.
When song is over the wife says to the husband,
"So, would you run to the store and get some milk?"

John says this is how we know what real love is:
Jesus shows us by laying down his life for us,
repeating what we heard in Gospel:
the shepherd lays down his life for the sheep.
The shepherd calls his sheep to follow him.
to love others as we love ourselves,
greater love has no one than this,
that he lay down his life for his brother.

Every now and then, we may hear of someone heroically
risking their life to save someone else.
But there may never be time we have to do a thing like this.
Greek work used here for life is "psyche",
can also be translated "soul" or "self", the spiritual life.
but another Greek word for life is used in v. 17: bios
referring to physical life, as in "making a living"
it is translated here as "world's goods"
"If anyone has the world's goods - is making a living -
and sees his brother in need, yet closes his heart against him,
how does God's love abide in him?"

We may never need to heroically sacrifice our lives
but we constantly have opportunities to help others
- especially family and brothers & sisters in faith -
with everyday life, with basic biological needs
Do we do it or are we too preoccupied with our own?
Do we say to selves: they can survive without my help.
John says, let's not just talk the talk, but love in deed & in truth.
We may have to look at our lives and wonder
if we are truly loving. Have we truly learned from Jesus?
What does my heart say about helping needy? ...my actions?
are we truly his followers or just wolves in sheep's clothing?
We should ask selves this, but then what should we do?

WE LEARN TO SHOW LOVE FROM GOD'S ASSURANCE

¹⁹ By this we shall know that we are of the truth and reassure our heart before him; ²⁰ for whenever our heart condemns us, God is greater than our heart, and he knows everything. ²¹ Beloved, if our heart does not condemn us, we have confidence before God; ²² and whatever we ask we receive from him, because we keep his commandments and do what pleases him. ²³ And this is his commandment, that we believe in the name of his Son Jesus Christ and love one another, just as he has commanded us.

Would you be more likely to help someone who is hungry -
if you have plenty or if you don't know
where your next meal is coming from?
Ironically, it is actually those who are needy themselves
who are often most ready to help others
because they know what it is like.

But being confident we are loved & cared for is what makes us
confident enough to love & take care of others.

If we look at our hearts & how they are reflected in our behavior
we may have to wonder about our salvation
because an honest conscience and God's law
will always condemn us. We never totally measure up.

But, John says, even when our own hearts condemn us,
God, who is greater, does not.

He knows everything, he knows how we constantly fail,
but he also knows what Jesus has done to save us
and so he declares us innocent.

It is when our hearts believe what he says
that they stop condemning us & we have confidence.

It is when we have confidence in God's love & our salvation
that we are free to love others.

Children who are loved & cared for and smiled at
learn to smile and be loving and share.

Those who do not feel love, reflect this in behavior
that is destructive to themselves and others.

Husbands and wives are to love each other sacrificially,
but how can I keep on giving & doing for that other one
if I don't see them doing the same for me?

It is only when I know for sure my needs will be met
not by that other person but by God himself.

In v. 23, God tells us to love one another, but first he tells us to believe in Jesus love for us.

When we do, then we want to do what is right,
and then what we want & pray for is right, so we receive
what we ask for, which is good for us & others.

John asks how we know we are of the truth
when we look at our lives and behavior.

God's love and salvation make a difference in our lives
& so loving behavior is evidence we are God's children.
but we are not confident of salvation because we are loving,
we are loving because we are confident of salvation.

So, if we see that we need to be more loving,
what we need is greater confidence in God and his love.
How does this happen?

WE LEARN CONFIDENCE IN GOD FROM HIS SPIRIT

²⁴ Whoever keeps his commandments abides in him, and he in them.
And by this we know that he abides in us, by the Spirit whom he has
given us.

In today's first reading we see Peter with bold confidence.

His liberty & life are threatened because of
and act of kindness he showed to a crippled man
but he doesn't regret it.

He wasn't always this way, not long before he had denied
he even knew Jesus, not he boldly claims his name.

What made the difference? It was the Holy Spirit
who came to him and the other disciples at Pentecost.

This same Holy Spirit comes to us in our baptisms.

How can we be confident we are in flock of Jesus' sheep?

It is by trusting his promise & claim on us in baptism.

It is because he has clothed us in the righteousness
of the lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world.

We are made to be sheep in our shepherd's clothing.

This Holy Spirit continues to speak to us in God's word
Jesus promised that the Spirit would keep reminding us
of his word to us. We need to keep listening.

Jesus said whoever abides, i.e. remains in his word,
remains in him. This is what Spirit helps us do.

So one thing Jesus commands us to do is

keep hearing his word and believing it,
keep receiving Holy Communion, which his word tells us

is his body and blood for the forgiveness of our sins,
keep believing are sins are forgiven in the name of
the father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.
When we do believe these unbelievably wonderful things
it is because Spirit himself is in us causing this faith.
and it is believing these things that causes his love for us
to remain in us and causes us to remain in him.
and it is his great love for us that moves us to love others
and to forgive & care for them.

John says, this is how we know what love is:

WE LEARN LOVE FOR OTHERS FROM JESUS

who laid down his life for us
and our love for him shows when we live our lives
in ways that help others.

This is how we know we are of the truth, we are genuine:

WE LEARN TO SHOW LOVE FROM GOD'S ASSURANCE

We don't always look loving, even to ourselves,
but we keep looking to Jesus' love for us
which assures us that our Good Shepherd cares for us
so that we can, without fear, care for others.

This is how we know that he abides in us:

WE LEARN CONFIDENCE IN GOD FROM HIS SPIRIT

who lives in us to keep reminding us of Jesus' word
and his forgiveness and his love
and his promise to keep giving us life,
both bios, biological life now, to share with others,
and psyche, spiritual life to share forever with him.