

By This We Will Know: The Dance of Love

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Date: 25 April 2021

Preacher: Pastor Cathy Hall Stengel

[0 : 00] The Crystal The Amen.

Amen. Amen.

The peace of the risen Christ be with you.

Amen. So let's share the peace with others by giving them a wave and making sure people know you're glad to see them, and it's just great to be here.

For those of you who are online or here that I haven't met, I'm Kathy Stengel, one of the pastors on the team here. And even though the sun doesn't look like yesterday, it's a beautiful day in the neighborhood, and the flowers know no difference.

[2 : 46] So it's a beautiful day in the neighborhood. Before we move into the next part of worship, I just want to share a joy that we got this morning, which is that Ollie Burbage is going to be 95 on the 29th.

Yay! So make sure you say happy birthday to her from afar, and we're just grateful that she can be here with us.

We are in the season of what's called Eastertide. In the church calendar year, this is a season that comes between Easter Sunday and Pentecost.

And then we move on to the season of Pentecost. So if it seems like we're talking about the resurrection a lot, we are. And for good reason, because we have life in the resurrection of Jesus Christ.

Easter is the unstoppable, unpredictable expression of God's love for all of us. The call of Jesus is to live fully into the power of the love that God showed when he sent Jesus.

[4 : 05] Alive in each of us, that love. We learn about that divine love as it's embodied in the person and the ministry of Jesus and the one who is the good shepherd.

As we look to him to learn how to love through his word, may our hearts praise the one who raised Jesus and who raises us to abundant life and love.

If we are to dance with abandon, we have been talking a little bit about dancing with abandon and abundant life and love. Then we must learn and follow, just like with any dance, so that we can begin to lead others in that same dance.

So we can learn the steps of the dance through the lead of Jesus and those who have gone before us. And the challenge is, may we dare to dance even as we continue to learn the way of love.

Let's pray.

[5 : 32] Let's pray. Let's pray.

Please stand if you're able. As we worship together, Jesus united by thy grace. Jesus united by thy grace.

Let us pray. Help us to help each other, Lord.

Each other's cross to bear. Let all our friendly aid afford. Let all our friendly aid afford. And fear each other's care.

Touched by the lodestone of thy love. Let all our hearts agree. And ever toward each other move.

[6 : 44] And ever move toward thee. This is the God of perfectness. Thy spotless charity.

O let us still, we pray, possess. The mind that was in thee. Glory to God.

Amen. Please be seated. Amen. Please be seated. Platz pleas. Feelings for radio.■. As you ask, people are orns for creativity. See you in the air.

Thank you.

Thank you.

[8 : 21] Thank you.

Thank you.

My name is Scott. I'm also part of the pastoral team here. It is a joy to be together with you as we worship together. The video you just saw is our mission moment for today. We know that as we have risen up to a challenge that we had not anticipated over this past year, that certain challenges remain with us.

Imagine no malaria is a ministry of our denomination, and we have been able to give generously to support this, and we have made a tremendous amount of difference in being able to combat this disease throughout the world.

That disease persists, even with the ways in which we have made the difference we have made. So today, as you consider the ways in which you are giving, sharing some of what God has generously given to you, designate a portion of that to continue this ongoing ministry throughout the world.

[10 : 14] Because this is a disease that's easily overcome if we are able to get the resources where they need to be. So let the Spirit move in you that you might make a contribution to that as well.

We all know we can give in our traditional ways. Those of you who are here can, of course, leave your gifts in the offering boxes on the way out. Those of you who are online can give electronically, or you can send your donations in.

Please let the Spirit move among you as we consider ways in which we might joyfully continue to be a part of God's ministry in this way.

Amen. Amen.

Amen. Amen.

[12 : 38] Amen. Amen.

Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.

Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Holy Redeemer, full of grace, you have given us so much, showered upon us your love, your blessings, your provision.

We give back to you a portion, a gift with our commitment, with our love, with our dedication to you, Lord. Receive these gifts that they may be a blessing to you.

Bless these gifts that they may be a blessing to others. We thank you and we praise you, Lord. In Jesus' name, amen. Please be seated.

[14 : 34] Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. I wanted to share with you this morning that next Sunday at 3 p.m., Janet, Kayla, and Becky Snyder will finally be able to have the memorial service for their father, Reverend Frank Wood, who attended here for many, many years.

So again, that's next Sunday at 3 p.m. for Frank Wood. I also want to bring attention to the Matthias family. Sue Matthias' father passed away the other day.

So please keep that family in prayer. So let's come to our Lord in prayer. Lord, you are so good.

And we open our hearts to you today, completely surrendering all of ourselves into your hands. Lord, we pray that your Holy Spirit will fill us now, reveal to us areas in our lives that you would like to have changed, revealed to us areas in our lives where you would want us to move, revealed to us areas in our life where we need to step in and follow you more.

We pray for your healing touch to be upon every area of our life and that we may be healing agents in this world. We pray for your hand to be upon those who are needing healing physically, Lord, the people in our heart, the people in our world.

[16 : 00] Lord, you know the people in our hearts. We pray for healing physically, that pain will be gone in the name of Jesus, that disease will be cast out, that people's bones and blood will be restored in Jesus' name.

Lord, we pray for a restoration of body to be the way you created it to be. Healer God, we pray that your healing hand will be upon our families, that you will fill our families with your grace, with your love and with your protection.

Provide for our families, Lord, in all areas. Draw our families closer to each other, closer to you. And we pray for an outpouring of your grace upon all of us, Lord, that there will be open hearts for forgiveness of one another, for amending of any broken relationships.

We pray that you'll reveal to us in this time the people that we need to reach out to, the people that we need to ask forgiveness for. And we pray that you will also reveal to us who we need to forgive.

Lord, we pray that you will continue to guide us, transform our minds, Lord, to have your mind, the mind of Christ, that we will walk in your way, and that we will know your voice, that when you call us, we will follow.

[17 : 25] Give us your courage. Help us to be strong and courageous, to follow boldly wherever you would lead. Lord, we pray for your protection over all of us, over this church, Lord, as we move forward in your ministry.

May we reach people in your holy name. Lord, we pray thanks to you, because we're trusting in you for all these things. And we know that you are our redeemer, our savior, our friend.

We lift them all up to you, the concerns on our heart, knowing that you hear us, you know us, and that you answer our call. In Jesus' name we pray.

Amen. Amen. Amen. Good morning, everyone.

It's really, really good to see all of you this morning, and I'm really happy to be back up here reading. And I can't wait until the day that we can get rid of these things. It's coming.

[19 : 12] It's coming soon. I just feel it. Today's scripture lesson is taken from the book of John, chapter 10, verses 11 through 17, and 1 John, chapter 3, verses 16 to 18.

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. And then 1 John 3, 16 to 18.

[20 : 21] 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 our Lord.

Amen. We're going to start by having a little bit of fun with this passage.

How many of you have heard sermons before on the sheep and the shepherd? And how many of you like to be considered a sheep? Not very many people.

[21 : 36] And sheep have gotten a bad rap over the generations, and there's a lot of reasons for that. Some of it is because sheep are followers, and they are stubborn, and they aren't always well thought of.

And so we kind of resist that idea that either a dog or a shepherd will move us all, and that we would be so mindless as that we would all go together rather than have minds of our own or have thoughts of our own.

And yet, here is this passage. The passage isn't meant to make us mindless or not have our own spirit and call in this world.

So let's talk about it. I sort of broke it up into a couple of different passages or parts. Shepherd, sheep, voice, and listening and knowing.

People have been looking since the time of Jesus to find images and ways to clarify or describe or talk about Jesus.

[22 : 55] How do we give people words for a savior? How do we give people words for a person without sin? How do we give people images?

And so the image of a shepherd is one that Jesus gives us, and it is one that is interpreted even in this passage in a couple of different ways.

This is one of the... We'll just leave that up there for... Just leave that. We'll get to that in a minute. The reality is, is that there are lots of different opinions about shepherds and sheep.

And Jesus says, I am the good shepherd. And he talks about the shepherd who runs away when the wolf comes.

And, you know, that means that basically the shepherd was hired to watch the sheep. But as soon as danger or threat of harm comes, they're gone.

[24 : 04] We could interpret that into our lives in many ways. People who take jobs for just the money but have no real commitment to the work, to the ministry, to the purpose of the organization they take a job with.

And as soon as it's too hard or they feel a little uncertain, they might leave. Anybody ever met anyone like that? Someone who just quits? I think sometimes that we have been not as selective as we could be in talking about my children's generation in terms of being a little bit like that.

You take a job, you get an education, and then if you don't like it, just leave it. Don't worry you don't have another one. Just leave it because you don't like it. And most of us grew up and some of my children are like that, that a job is a job.

And until you have something else in hand, you just better keep this one unless you're being harmed in some way by that job. But there are people, especially in some areas of work, that they don't have a commitment to purpose.

And maybe it's because the organization doesn't have a purpose, doesn't have a sense of value for their employees, for the people that work for them. Like we don't know when Jesus is talking about the hired shepherd.

[25 : 32] Who hired the shepherd? Is it somebody who didn't offer benefits? Is it somebody who didn't indicate that if the job is dangerous that they would be compensated differently for it?

Is it somebody who just doesn't care about them? Whereas Jesus talks about himself as the good shepherd. And then we have from 1 John, this is the one who gave his life and taught us to love and that's how they'll know who we are.

They'll know we are Christians by our love. And that doesn't mean that we're just happy, happy, joy, joy all the time. But it means that we have a sense of what that's about.

We have a sense that we have a part in it because if Jesus is our shepherd, Jesus has proven he's not just in it for the money.

We know in his life he got nothing. He's in it forever. Commitment to you and to me. He gave his life and God sent him to give his life for you and I.

[26 : 47] That's a kind of love that we can barely even imagine. Mr. Rogers was known to say often when there was trouble or stress or children were afraid, do you know what he would say to them?

Who would you look for? The helpers. Mr. Rogers taught children to look for the helpers because he wanted to teach them during times of stress in their families, in their communities, and in their world that there were helpers and that that's where they should turn.

Now, in some places that's not necessarily a good thing. You know, there are parts of this world where the helpers aren't safe people and there are parts of this world where the helpers are the best people to turn to.

So we have to figure out who the helpers are. And my sense is that part of what God calls us to is to not just be the sheep who go where anybody tells us, but to be the sheep who begin to learn how to be shepherds of those who are lost around us.

There used to be a sense when it comes to sheep, first of all, they're mentioned 500 times in the Bible. Back in this time when Jesus is talking, sheep were the most common source of food, of creating warm clothing, of a variety of things in the life that they shared.

[28 : 35] They used the milk from the sheep, they made cheese, they fed their families, and they never sacrificed a sheep until they had one coming to take its place.

So they cared for the sheep. And the sheep that we see often, and now you can, this image that's up there, which is one of the, maybe you've seen it, maybe you haven't.

This is one of the images of Jesus carrying a sheep when Jesus was about, looks like, 14, 15, 16, something like that.

And look at the way that they are together. The sheep knows that this shepherd cares about him or her.

this sheep knows that the sheep is seen. So sheep, when they are out and about, have been reputed to be, like I said, stubborn.

[29 : 47] People have often not liked being compared to sheep because they don't always smell good. They have been thought to be not the smartest animal in the barnyard.

that's actually been disproven because the sheep, sheep have now been studied because somebody gets paid to study sheep and know sheep.

And they said they actually know socialization and they can learn things. So what does a sheep learn about a shepherd? If a shepherd protects the sheep, then the sheep absorb the shepherd into their community.

That person is no longer seen as a threat if that shepherd protects them. It doesn't matter that they're different species. But if the shepherd doesn't protect the sheep, then chaos ensues.

If the shepherd is more interested in being over here watching videos or doing something nonproductive but doesn't really care for the sheep, chaos comes.

[30 : 59] The wolf comes and scares the sheep and scatters them and maybe eats one. I wonder what it would be like if that happened, if there was no shepherd that would actually care for the sheep.

What would happen if the sheep became the wolves? What would happen if the sheep took on the characteristics of a wolf and began to attack each other?

I think I've seen that. I think we've seen that in our world. I think we've seen that in our country where people turn on each other forgetting that they'll know we are Christians by our love.

It's interesting that it used to be that there was a thought that the white sheep were the most precious of all because their wool could be dyed to any color that we might want for sweaters and scarves and coats and things like that.

And what's been amazing over the years is that the sheep that look more like the one in the picture that are multicolored or of a different color or because, you know, all white sheep is just not really a thing because that's not how the world works.

[32 : 23] That's not how the species works. And the truth is is that the wool of some of the other colored sheep are just as valuable, sometimes more valuable, than that of the white sheep because they don't have to be dyed.

I saw that in Peru when I watched women weave and they dyed some of the wool and they didn't dye other parts of the wool. So the call to us as the ones who say we believe that Jesus is our shepherd, he says, they'll know my voice.

I will know them and they will know me. And so we might say, well, how? I think a lot of us want to get an email or a text message or a phone call or how about just show up, Jesus, right in front of me and tell me what to do.

I felt that way. What is it you want, God? So how is it that we who call ourselves people of faith know that it is God who's nudging us or inviting us or maybe kicking us?

Go. Go. The first thing is, is it scriptural? Does it come based in what the Bible tells us?

[33 : 45] And you heard that in 1 John that if we love as the commandments tell us, if we follow the Ten Commandments and we follow the greatest commandment to love God, love your neighbor, love yourself, then I think we can trust that it's God's pushing, nudging, inviting in terms of a way for us to go.

If it's contrary to scripture, I can tell you that it's not. It's not God who's calling. Not if it involves violence or a mean-spiritedness or oppression taking over to the cost of other people.

people. And in the Old Testament you see that. You see war and killing and often used as a part of our faith story. But Jesus came to put an end to that.

Jesus came for they'll know we are Christians by our love. So that's how when we listen for God, that's part of how we know it's from God.

And it might, we might get it wrong. Anybody know you've ever gotten it wrong? You're going to like go left or go right and you go left and then you get down here a little bit and you realize you should have gone right?

[34 : 59] It's alright. I've done it. Mike Clifford has done it. He raised his hand back there. You know, we don't always get it right.

But God sent Jesus to come and find us. God sent Jesus to shepherd us back and the Holy Spirit is used to bring us back.

The lyrics to a song I listened to this morning says, when I can't find myself, when the pieces of me are not together as they used to be, you find the me that you want me to be.

You hear that? You find the me that you want me to be and help to knit back together those pieces that have become broken for whatever reason. The shepherd that watches over the sheep.

Not just this part or this part or this part or this part to the exclusion of the rest. the shepherd who watches over us, who gifts us with that safety, that sense of going with us, then asks us to look around and see.

[36 : 23] Are there sheep? Are there people that I don't know? Are there people who don't know that Jesus would welcome them into the fold?

Are there people who don't know that they're loved by God? Are there people who have been taught over the years that they're not good enough, that they don't measure up, that they don't deserve to have communion for whatever reason?

That they, you know, the people who say, well, lightning will strike the church if I show up. and my response to that, it'll be fireworks to welcome you into the fold.

We are, you and I, we are the proof of the resurrection. And you might say, wait, no, Jesus is the proof of the resurrection.

It's us and the way we live that's proof of the resurrection, which means that we get to be who God made us to be. And that means we're not always happy all the time.

[37 : 32] Bad things happen to Christians. So, if they'll know we're Christians by our love, yes, they'll know that we are Christians by our love, that means that we're not good all the time, but somebody might come along next to us and help us to come back, to be circled in, to be gathered up, and to know that there is no rejection from the body of Christ, from those of us who are called to build the flock, not cull it, into only the sheep that we like or the sheep that we're comfortable with, but rather to kind of push it out.

So, how will people know we are Christians by our love? Some of the great theologians kind of brought it down really small and summarized it by Jesus loves me, this I know, for the Bible tells me so.

And you might think that is so stinking simplistic, but it's not because so many of us don't truly absorb the fact that Jesus loves us.

Many of us don't absorb that the message of God is you are sacred and of sacred worth. You are why Jesus died, and so is any person who rides by here, walks by here, uses their motorcycles to run by five o'clock, worship on Saturday, and they'll know we are Christians by our love, by how we respond to people.

Do we respond with compassion? Do we respond with not fixing people or fixing their problems? Because I don't know about you, but I'm not gifted to fix all the problems.

[39 : 29] I cannot solve world hunger, but I can put my food in or my money in just like the next person. I cannot fix all that's broken in the world, and I used to say in my own little corner in my own little chair, that's from Cinderella, and that doesn't mean isolated, me in the corner in my chair.

It means what can I do? What can I do to not only make sure that those I encounter know that they are welcome into this flock, but to know that whatever flock they go to, if it's a flock of faith, then they will be loved?

What do people see above our masks? What do people see in our demeanor towards each other, towards the people we encounter? Will they know we are Christians by our love?

And the challenge is, and this has been shared many times, that if any one of us was accused of being a Christian, will there be enough evidence to prove us guilty? I'm in for doing the best I can.

I hope you are too. We can only do the best we can. Because even though we can be the proof of a resurrected, saving, forgiving, everlasting love of Jesus, we can't make people do that.

[40 : 59] all we can do is act like we're loved, to act like we're human, to act like people who have struggled, but have found comfort in faith.

There's people out there that all they want to know is, do we really do what we believe? Do we really, do we really know that we are Christians by our love?

and so it is my prayer that we will truly know the love of God made known in Jesus Christ and moved by the Holy Spirit and yes, they will know that we are each and all Christians by our love.

Amen. Amen. We all got so inspired, all three of us wanted to come up here.

So as we prepare to come to the Lord's table, let us open our hearts and receive the great gift that God has given in the sacrament of communion.

[42 : 21] Will you open yourselves to the grace of Jesus Christ that is always and already available here at this table? If so, say open us to your grace, Lord.

Open us to your grace, Lord. Will you open yourselves once again to the call of Jesus Christ? If so, say open us to your call, Lord.

Open us to your call, Lord. Will you open yourselves to the possibility of transformation through Jesus Christ? If so, say transform us, Lord.

Transform us, Lord. As we prepare to attend the heavenly feast, feast, we especially pray for those who have no earthly table, or no place at a table, or so little daily bread.

We confess this day that we have been slow to join the dance that brings life to all, brings love to all, and brings sustenance to all.

[43 : 29] In silence, let us offer our prayers of confession. hear this good news.

God has loved you from the beginning. The invitation of Christ is never ending, because resurrection can happen at any moment.

The Holy Spirit is transforming you even now. In the name of Jesus Christ, you are forgiven. In the name of Jesus Christ, you are forgiven.

Glory to God. Amen. The risen Lord be with you. And also shall we be. So lift up your hearts and voices. Let us give great thanks to the Lord our God.

Holy and living one, you transformed a whole lot of nothing into this amazing creation. You breathed life all around and called it good.

[44 : 50] You invited us to the wonder of it all. And when we could not face you, you turned us around. And you keep bringing us around and around, time and again, offering us the chance to join this freedom dance.

And so we join the glorious chorus of saints, past and present, singing a never-ending hymn of praise. Holy, holy, holy Lord, God of power and might, heaven and earth are full of your glory.

Hosanna in the highest. Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord. Hosanna in the highest. Indeed, you are holy, and blessed is your son, Jesus, the anointed one, the liberator, our dance partner, sibling, and friend.

Jesus sat at tables with those who had no place and offered fulfilling food for their bodies and their souls. And on the night in which he would give all love for us, he sat at a table with his extended family, just as he hosts this table here and now with us as his extended family.

He offered the usual prayers of thanks to you, God, over bread and cup, then disrupted the gathering with some unfamiliar words, saying, take and eat this bread, for this is my body, which is given for you.

[46 : 34] Every time you gather around the table together, do this and remember me. And take and drink from this cup, each and every one of you.

It's a sign of a new covenant. The darkness has given way to the light and the resurrection dance goes on. This is love poured out for all people.

Whenever you gather around the table together, do this and remember me. And so, my friends, we remember and we believe that Christ has died, Christ is risen, Christ will come again.

Pour out your Holy Spirit on us now. Pour out your transforming presence on the gifts of this body and the gifts of this bread and the fruit of the vine. May they be for us your life and love, uniting us as one body, Christ's body, for the sake of loving the world.

And now, let us pray together the prayer that Jesus taught us to pray. Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name. Thy kingdom come, thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.

[48 : 00] Give us this day our daily bread, and forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us, and lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil.

For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory forever. Amen. The table extends beyond this physical space, into the space of the spirit that unites us.

May this meal ready us to go to love, trust, and dance to the beat of God's heart. I invite you now to take your elements and remove your mask. Let's open the side that has the bread on it.

Know that this is the body of Christ which is given for you. Take now and receive. As you open the other side, know that this is the blood of Christ which was shed for you.

Take now and receive God's gift. May the blessing of God that comes to us in these gifts of bread and cup bless your life.

[49 : 24] Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.

Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. As Jesus' love fills us and flows through us, we sing about the love that is given to us and given to others.

We are one in the Spirit. We are one in the Lord. We are one in the Lord.

And we pray that our unity may one day be restored. And they'll know we are Christians by our love.

By our love. Yes, they'll know we are Christians by our love. We will walk with each other.

[50 : 32] We will walk hand in hand in hand. We will walk with each other. We will walk hand in hand. And together we'll spread the news that God is in our land.

And they'll know we are Christians by our love. By our love. Yes, they'll know we are Christians by our love.

we will work with each other. We will work side by side. We will work with each other.

We will work side by side. And we'll guard each one's dignity and save each one's pride.
And they'll know we are Christians by our love.

By our love. Yes, they'll know we are Christians by our love. All praise to the Father from
whom all beings come.

[51 : 40] And all praise to Christ Jesus His only Son. And all praise to the Spirit who makes us one.

And they'll know we are Christians by our love. By our love. Yes, they'll know we are
Christians by our love.

As we go from this place, on this day, and into this week, know that you are loved. God.
So go, and be known by that love.

The love of God, the love of Jesus Christ, and the love of Holy Spirit be yours. Amen.
Thank you.

Thank you.