

**St. Luke's Episcopal Church
Lindale, Texas**

Fourth Sunday of Easter

April 22, 2018

1 John 3:16-24 & John 10:11-18

The Reverend John P. Carr

Abiding Love

There were many acts of sacrificial love between men in war during WW II. The last flight of a B-17 called "**10 Horse Power**" is a story about the last flight of a B-17 and how it ended. The crew, like many others left England in a flight of B-17's over Germany and no fighter escort once they crossed the English Channel. They arrived over the target and had just released their bomb load when a flak burst tore a hole in them and they began to fall out of formation. Then they were spotted by a German fighter who dove for the attack and killed the copilot and grievously wounded the pilot. The plane went into a dive. The unconscious pilot and co-pilot were slumped over the controls and the engineer was wounded as well.

Only one other man knew how to fly the B-17 and he was the top gunner who the pilot had let fly the plane in good weather. Now he had to act. He was able to fight his way forward in the mounting pressure of the spinning airplane as it entered a death spiral. He pulled the co-pilot out of his seat and took his place. Now it was up to him and he pulled the yoke with all his strength to save the plane and the crew. Down they went. Then the wings began to level, they were below the clouds and the land was coming up fast but they were leveling out. Just as it seemed all was lost, the gunner pulled the plane up as it roared across a little town just feet above the buildings.

They were saved for the moment. They headed back to England but the plane was almost uncontrollable. The gunner sat in the wind blast behind the shot out wind screen. He was freezing and exhausted but determined to get the crew home. He held on and crossed the channel. He was in England and approaching the base.

Now they had to decide. He wanted to save the captain and the crew but he had to land a plane that was barely flying and he had never landed a plane of any type before. He decided that the crew who were able, would bail out over the base as he flew by and they would be saved but he would continue fly the plane and try to save the wounded men who could not jump by landing.

He could have flown on out to sea again and bailed out himself but he was determined to risk it and try to save the crew who could not jump. The men who bailed out were now safely out over the field.

The gunner circled the great bomber and the tower tried to talk him down to the field but he was too fast on his first pass and pulled up to try again.

He was out of energy but held on and went around again but now he was getting too low on fuel. He could only make one more attempt. He decided to try to land in an open field to save the men and not crash on the airfield. Lower and slower he went toward the swath of green coming up to meet him. The plane touched down but too fast and raced across the field. He did all he could to slow the plane but it impacted the rising land on the far side of the field.

There was only a little fire when the fire trucks pulled up to the wreck because there was no fuel left in the tanks. The gunner was killed in the crash, the unconscious pilot survived as did the engineer. The gunner had saved them but given his life in the process.

Such is the love of men who have lived, worked and gone through terrible experiences together. He loved those men and he was determined to take action to save them. His action... was an act of love.

We are called by Jesus to love one another.

We are called by Jesus at various points in the Gospels to repent, believe and to love. This formula of turning away from the ways of the world and turning our hearts to Jesus is the beginning of belief in Him. Even those who were very close to Jesus had their misunderstandings, doubts and hesitation in believing who Jesus was and what he was doing.

His call to believe wasn't for His sake but for ours. His call for us to believe is really a call from Jesus for us to save ourselves before it is too late. Jesus went literally to great pains to make it clear that He is the Messiah who is the fulfillment of the Law and the Prophets so that His Jewish followers would understand. Many did, many didn't.

Jesus and His Father were determined to save the people of the world and they formed a plan. It was a plan to do something that was so breath taking and undeniable in its love that surely His people would believe and follow. *Their plan was that the Father would sacrifice His Son to prove His love and have the people follow Him. Then, if they believed, they would be saved.*

But unlike the story of Abraham and Isaac, that all the Jews knew, this time the Father sent the Son and the Son willingly obeyed His Father. He died in a very public way as the Lamb of God at Passover.

Surely they would understand. Those marked with the blood of this Lamb would be saved. Surely they would understand. Many did, many didn't.

Jesus is the good shepherd. He said so! He is the shepherd who towers over and loves his flock. He is there to protect the flock from the evil one who prowls about like a roaring lion. He is willing to die to protect His flock. He will put himself between them and danger. Those who know the voice of the shepherd listen to him and follow Him in safety, those who stray can fall victim to Satan.

He gives us the model of love as self-sacrifice and calls us to that same sacrifice. We may never have the opportunity to give our lives to save another as dramatically as the gunner in the B-17 or Jesus on the cross, but we do give a part of our lives every day when we love sacrificially.

What does life look like without sacrificial love? John expresses this clearly when he asks, *“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?”* James expresses the same thought when he asks, *“If a brother or sister is naked and lacks daily food, and one of you says to them, ‘Go in peace; keep warm and eat your fill,’ and yet you do not supply their bodily needs, what is the good of that? So faith by itself, if it has no works, is dead.”* James 2:16

How then do we love? What is the test of how it is expressed? We love as John said, *“not in words or speech, but in truth and action. By this we will know that are from the truth..”*

When we put our faith into action, we do something for someone.

Paul said that *“the only thing that matters is faith expressing itself through love.”*

When we do this, when we love one another, we are obeying the last command that Jesus left with His disciples. When we do this, then Jesus abides in us, and we in Him.

We know this because Jesus kept his promise and sent the Advocate to us, the Holy Spirit to be in us and to guide us. By this we know he abides in us.

What does faith in action look like today?

- That is, for instance, when you take a part of your day to help in a senior's program and see the light turn on again in a lonely old person and experience them smile a smile and laugh a laugh that they have not had for a long time.
- It is when you take a part of your Saturday to prepare our church for a Sunday worship service.
- It is when you teach a Sunday school class or
- help organize and facilitate an outreach program for women from the community in our church enabling them to restart their lives with hope based on faith.
- These acts are faith in action.
- These are acts of sacrificial love by being the hands of Christ in the world.

There is much more to do and many who need us. We need only to put our faith into action by looking for and being open to those opportunities as they present themselves. A *sin* is an evil thought, *meeting an opportunity*. An act of *sacrificial love*, is a heart full of the love of Christ, *meeting a need*.

We need only keep our focus on Jesus, and have the mind of Christ, then, when called upon, we can put our faith into action when the opportunity presents itself. God's love abides in those who believe in and love Him. He is there with you when you put your faith into action.

Amen