

Sermon for Cashmere Presbyterian Church

Sunday 21st April 2024

Preacher: Rev Phil King

Laying Down our Lives - Giving, Doing, Being

Introduction:

Some people might ask, "Why do we do Global Mission? And why do we still do it? Is there a time when it should finish?"

Using 1st John 3: 16-24 let's explore an answer to these questions with some reference to our current activity.

We'll use this text to help us do that, "We know love by this, that he laid down his life for us—and we ought to lay down our lives for one another."

Laying Down our Lives

The epistles of John are connected to the gospel of John through their authors belonging to what became known as the Johannine community. In NT scholarship there are disputes about authorship, and the Johannine community itself - but I go with the commonly held theory that the authors came from the same community, and that the gospel and epistles have different authors. And that at the time of writing 1st John, the community was in dispute over issues of theology and lifestyle, and these disputes had become

serious. So the author of 1st John is at pains to describe what it really means to be a follower of Jesus. He was saying, “**This** is how we live as Christians. Don’t be confused by what they are doing and saying. This is the true gospel here.”

We’re committed to each other. We *lay down our lives* for each other.

We are Christians because Jesus laid down *his* life for *us*. That’s the foundation of everything – and so we, therefore should be imitators of that. *Our* lives should reflect that and give expression to that.

And he goes on to add some detail to that, which we could summarise this way

- he says that laying down our lives includes:

- Loving by giving
- Loving by doing
- Loving by being, or being with

So we’ll use this framework to answer the question, why do we still do global mission?

Loving by Giving

“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?”

So here he adds another layer to the meaning of laying down our lives to include the sharing of our livelihood.

And if we are followers of Christ who are prepared to lay down our lives then sharing from our material wealth is a given and by far the *lesser* requirement.

It's not new – he's reaching into the heart of Christianity's heritage from early Judaism. Deuteronomy 15:7, "Do not harden your heart or close your hand against your brother who is poor."

The theme is there throughout the Hebrew Scriptures and in Jesus ministry; and a similar comment is found in James 2:15-16 – "If a brother or sister lacks daily food, ¹⁵and 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?"

This was coming from a lived reality in their communities and was not theoretical. To be Christian is to love by giving. That's a core value.

And that's always been at the heart of global mission as well; generous people responding to need and giving what they can; refusing to accept the excuses of geographical and logistical limitations; and loving by giving globally. And it's always heartwarming when you see the results.

- Hamish visiting Onesua College and seeing the result of funds given by this congregation.
- The restored roof

Loving by Doing

v. 18, "Let us not love by words, but in actions and truth."

In saying love must manifest itself in deeds the author was attacking a theology that said deeds were not necessary for salvation, since eternal life was gained through faith in Jesus Christ. A little bit like the mis-quoted quote, "Love God and do as you like", attributed to St. Augustine. Augustine apparently said this when preaching on 1st John 4:4-12 . But he would have been dismayed knowing what some people had done with his quote.

To love through doing has been ingrained as an example of what it is to live an authentic Christian life. The well-known and highly respected Christian author and mystic Father Richard Rohr founded a centre for contemplative studies where Christians can go and learn about prayer and the contemplative life. But he called it the Centre for **Action** and Contemplation – because he wanted to emphasise that contemplation on its own misses the point. Our own PCANZ says it succinctly in our Five Faces of Mission:

The Presbyterian Church of Aotearoa New Zealand believes it is called by God to work with others in making Jesus Christ known through –

- *Teaching and nurturing people in Christian faith*
- *Loving service responding to human need*

- *Proclaiming the gospel*
- *Seeking to transform society*
- *Caring for God's creation*

That's loving by doing.

And again, there's no geographical restriction. So just as the man from Macedonia called to Paul in Acts 16 and said, "Come over and help us" – so too do we respond to requests for help from our partners. That's why we have someone teaching English at Talua College in Vanuatu - because they asked us; that's why we have a team of chaplains going to Vanuatu in June to lead a training event for Vanuatu chaplains – because they asked us; that's why we hosted their finance manager here to learn about how we manage our finances – because they asked us. The *nature* of the help is changing which I think is a sign of growth and maturity – but the need for help is still articulated. Loving by doing. There's still a call to global mission and we're responding in accordance with our gifts.

- Current request for an education specialist

Loving by Being; or Being With

²³And this is his commandment, that we should believe in the name of his Son Jesus Christ and love one another, just as he has commanded us.

Some commentators have said this verse might serve very well as the New Testament sentence that best expresses the essence of Christianity. Certainly the essence of every local church's pastoral strength is that week in, week out, year by year, loving by being with in the highs and lows of life in community. And it's the same in global mission; it's through being *with and alongside* our global mission partners that our faith is shaped and formed and sharpened.

- *Vanuatu Assembly shots*

St. Thomas School, Jagadhri (2 photos)

Last year we hosted no less than three groups of visitors from the Presbyterian Church in Taiwan in New Zealand. The reason for this is that they have identified in the PCANZ something of value for themselves. And that is the bicultural partnership the PCANZ has with Te Aka Puahou.

So they came, spent time dwelling with TAP at the marae in Ohope and visiting PCANZ in other regions of the country. In this instance, all we needed to do was be here, be who we are and mutual learning took place. Loving by being, and being with.

One of the roles I have been filling in the past few years is as chair of the Presbyterian Church of Myanmar partners roundtable meeting. This is a group of global church partners who support the Myanmar church. We meet on Zoom. As a result of the military coup in Myanmar in 2021, it's been impossible

to travel there and our meetings have become difficult, as we listen to the news of suffering and trauma being inflicted on the people of that country, including the members of the church. It's difficult hearing it; but by meeting together, listening, sharing and praying for them, encouragement is given and received. So they know they are not alone. Loving by being with. Even on Zoom, the global connection is important.

I'll share one final example, also to do with Myanmar. A few weeks ago I visited a former Myanmar refugee family who live in Wellington. When I met them in 2019 they were attending one of our congregations so they are connected with the PCANZ pastorally. They are Presbyterian and I have visited members of their family in Myanmar. Through complicated family dynamics there was a son and step-son, Ngaihzuala, who remained in Myanmar when the rest of the family came to New Zealand. In the past month this family received the news that Ngaihzuala, was killed in a clash between an ethnic defence force and the Myanmar military. It's a devastating loss of life that illustrates how even those who manage to escape oppressive regimes find it hard to be free from the reach of the violence that caused them to flee their homeland.

My wife Keryn and I know this family well, have visited them often and hosted them in our own home. On an occasion like this we could not give anything, could not do anything to ease their pain. All I could do was visit with them, sit

with them, be with them, and pray. Loving by being with, as they mourned the loss of a 25-year-old son and brother.

Laying down our lives is a call to serve without geographical limits. Because the call to mission is both local, and global.

Loving by giving, loving by doing, and loving by being with – may our hearts and minds be opened to see how each of us can respond to this invitation to share in how God is at work in the world, both here, and wherever that call might take us.