

Australian Evangelical Lutheran Church
BETHLEHEM TOOWOOMBA, OUR SAVIOUR LOWOOD, ST JOHN'S AUBIGNY,
ST PAUL'S GREENWOOD, TRINITY MARBURG, TRINITY OAKEY
21st April Fourth Sunday of Easter

HYMNS: 391 154 381 390

INTROIT Psalm 23

The LORD is my shepherd, I shall not lack anything.

He makes me lie down in green pastures; He leads to water where I may rest.

He restores my soul; He leads me in the paths of righteousness for His name's sake.

Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I shall fear no evil; for You are with me; Your rod and Your staff, they comfort me.

You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies; You anoint my head with oil; my cup overflows.

Surely goodness and mercy will follow me all the days of my life; and I shall dwell in the house of the LORD for ever.

COLLECT: Almighty God, merciful Father, since You have wakened from death the Shepherd of Your sheep, grant us Your Holy Spirit that, when we hear the voice of our Shepherd, we may know Him who calls us each by name and follow where He leads; through the same Jesus Christ, Your Son, our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. Amen.

READINGS

Acts 4:1-12 Peter and John witness to the risen Christ before the Jewish council.

1 John 3:16-24 He paid the cost of love, and we also should love one another.

John 10:11-18 The Good Shepherd dies for His sheep.

Welcome to all worshipping with us!

Pastor Ziebell can be contacted via phone/text at 0407 583922.

Please notify pastor of anyone who is unwell or in need of a visit.

Email him at paziebell@gmail.com or to the church office at ddaelc@gmail.com.

Pastor is usually in his office Tuesday-Wednesday for anyone who would like to call in. Other days of the week are set aside for visits.

Acts 4:1-12

¹ While Peter and John were speaking to the people, the priests, the captain of the Temple and the Sadducees approached them. ² They were extremely annoyed because Peter and John were teaching the people and preaching in Jesus

the resurrection of the dead. ³ They laid their hands on them and put them in custody until the next day. For it was already evening. ⁴ However, many of those who had heard the Word had become believers, and the number of the men grew to about five thousand. ⁵ On the next day, their rulers, elders and scribes assembled in Jerusalem. ⁶ Annas the High Priest, Caiaphas, John and Alexander were there and all the other members of the High Priest's family. ⁷ They made the two men stand in the middle and began to ask, "By what power or by what name have you done this?"

⁸ Then Peter, filled with the Holy Spirit, replied to them, "Rulers of the people and elders! ⁹ If we are being examined today because of a good deed that we have done to a crippled man, by what means he has been made well, ¹⁰ let it be known to you all and to all the people of Israel, that by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, whom you crucified, whom God has raised from the dead, by Him this man is standing here before you in good health! ¹¹ This is **'the Stone that was rejected by you builders, which has become the Cornerstone.'** ¹² There is also salvation in no one else. For there is no other name under heaven that has been given among human beings by which we must be saved."

1 John 3:16-24

¹⁶ This is how we know love: He has laid down His life for us. We also ought to lay down our lives for our brothers. ¹⁷ If anyone has this world's goods and sees his brother in need but shuts his heart against him, how does the love of God remain in him? ¹⁸ Little children, let us not only love in words or in talk but in deeds and in truth! ¹⁹ This is how we shall know that we belong to the truth and how we shall assure our hearts before Him: ²⁰ For whenever our hearts condemn us, God is greater than our hearts and knows everything. ²¹ Dearly loved people, if our hearts do not condemn us, we have confidence before God ²² and receive from Him whatever we ask for, because we keep His Commandments and do the things that are pleasing in His sight. ²³ This is also His Commandment, that we should believe in the name of His Son, Jesus Christ and love one another as He has commanded us. ²⁴ He who keeps His Commandments remains in God, and God remains in him. This is also how we know that He remains in us: by the Spirit, whom He has given to us.

John 10:11-18

¹¹ "I am the Good Shepherd. The Good Shepherd lays down His life for the sheep. ¹² When the hired man, who is not the shepherd and who does not own the sheep, sees the wolf coming, he leaves the sheep and runs away, and the wolf catches them and scatters them. ¹³ He runs away because he is a hired man and does not care about the sheep. ¹⁴ I am the Good Shepherd and I know My own, and My own know Me, ¹⁵ as the Father knows Me, and I know the Father and lay down My life for the sheep. ¹⁶ I also have other sheep, which are not in this fold. I must also lead them, they will listen to My voice, and there will be one

flock and **one Shepherd**.¹⁷ The reason why the Father loves Me is that I lay down My life, that I may take it back again.¹⁸ No one takes it from Me, but I lay it down of My own accord. I have authority to lay it down and have authority to take it back again. This command I have received from My Father.

JESUS HAS LAID DOWN HIS LIFE FOR US
Sermon for the 4th Sunday of Easter 2024
1 John 3:16-24

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all. Amen.

The text for our sermon today is the Second Reading from before, 1 John 3:16-24: Lord God, heavenly Father, sanctify us through Your truth, Your Word is truth. Amen.

Dear friends in Christ,

The first hymn we sang in our worship service today was that beautiful hymn, “The King of Love My Shepherd Is.” That is rather appropriate as this day in the church year is known as “Good Shepherd Sunday,” and we need a good shepherd to lead, guard, and guide us! That’s why we follow Jesus and listen to His voice. We sing His praises because of His great love for us. He has loved us so much that He has even “**laid down His life for us**.”

What are the results of Jesus laying down His life for us? This is what we shall endeavour to find out today.

Under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, John wrote two of our readings today, both our Second Reading and the Gospel, and the thread that connects both readings is this idea of “*love that lays down its life*.” You see it show up in both places. In 1 John 3:16, John writes, “**This is how we know love: He has laid down His life for us**.” That, in turn, refers back to our Gospel today from John 10, where Jesus says that He lays down His life for us. Jesus uses this same phrase over and over. He says: “*The Good Shepherd lays down His life for the sheep*.” “*I lay down My life, that I may take it back again*.” “*I lay it down of My own accord. I have authority to lay it down and have authority to take it back again*” (John 10:11, 17-18). Jesus here is really emphasising His commitment to lay down His life for us.

And Jesus doesn’t just talk the talk, but He walks the walk! He actually does lay down His life for us. He willingly enters into suffering and death for our sake, for our sins. Christ lays down His life by being lifted up on the cross. This is self-giving, self-sacrificial love, love that goes to the utmost. “*No one has greater love than this, to lay down his life for his friends*,” Jesus says (John 15:13). That is how much Christ has loved us!

His love - the love that lays down its life - *has powerful effects*. The very Son of God has shed His blood to cover the sins of the world. Because Christ has put this love of His into action to deal with our greatest need, all our sins are atoned for and forgiven. We could not do this ourselves, but Jesus can, and **He has**. His great love has wonderful results! Our sin has been paid for. Death is done away with. Death no longer has any claim on us. Satan, that old wolf, cannot devour the sheep any longer. The Good Shepherd has laid down His life to save us from sin, Satan, and death.

This Shepherd who lays down His life has the authority to take it up again!¹ That's what Easter is all about. Christ's resurrection shows that He has decisively defeated death and the grave, and the result of His resurrection will be our own resurrection since we have been baptised into Christ. When Jesus comes again on the Last Day, He will raise up our mortal bodies to put on immortality. These are the wonderful results of Christ laying down His life for us.

But there are even more good results. Not only do we have eternal life, but we have new life **even now**. Even now, we have been raised to the newness of life with Christ. Even now, we know what love really is since we have received it and experienced it ourselves. Even now, we share in Christ's character of love. His love rings true and resonates in our hearts. We know love, so now we can share it with others. That's the way God's love works.

This is what John is getting at when he writes in his Letter, "**This is how we know love: He has laid down His life for us. We also ought to lay down our lives for our brothers.**" Since we know love, we are able to show love. The Jesus kind of love, the love that lays down its life.

Well, now this sounds kind of heroic, doesn't it, laying down your life for our brothers? It sounds like we're making the ultimate sacrifice. Well, if it came to that, I guess we would do it. But that kind of sacrifice, involving physical death, doesn't come along very often. More often - in fact, very common - is the laying down of our life that calls for giving up on our self-will, our self-interest, in order to help a brother or sister in need. And this can happen a lot, almost every day, in fact. You see, it's not just the big act of sacrificial love that rolls around once in a blue moon. No, it's more like the countless little acts of love that we can do on a daily basis. That's how we generally find opportunities to lay down our lives for our brothers and sisters.

¹ John 10:17

“We also ought to lay down our lives for our brothers,” John writes. Then he explains what that looks like: **“If anyone has this world’s goods and sees his brother in need but shuts his heart against him, how does the love of God remain in him? ¹⁸ Little children, let us not only love in words or in talk but in deeds and in truth!”**

The love that lays down its life happens like this: You see a brother in need, in whatever kind of need he has, and you go ahead and help him in whatever way you can. You put your love into action. This Christ-like love takes the initiative and actually helps others. It’s not just a warm and fuzzy feeling. No, love works; it acts in practical ways. That’s what Jesus did when He laid down His life for us. So that’s what we do as His people. We lay down our lives for our brothers in deed and in truth.

This active love, this help - sometimes it’s financial and material, when we have the world’s goods, and we can give a portion of it away in a way that will help others. Those others may be brothers and sisters right here in our own congregation, members in need of some help and assistance. They may be brothers and sisters further away. Where do you see brothers you can help? Just look around. There is an opportunity for you to put love into action.

Sometimes, opportunities for love may not even cost much money. Instead, they may call for our time or our patience or our thoughtfulness. Simple things like providing a ride to church or to a doctor’s appointment. Making a phone call to see how somebody’s doing. The point is, that there are many ways to put love into action in all sorts of situations.

But now, when you are told of these things, you may start thinking of something else. You may think to yourself if you’re honest: *“Well, I know I’m supposed to love my fellow Christians. I know I’m supposed to lay down my life for them. I’m supposed to be willing to help them in practical ways, and I should be looking for opportunities to do that. But do you know what? The truth is - and I’m ashamed to say it - I haven’t done such a good job of loving others. At heart, I’m kind of selfish. I don’t take the initiative to lay down my life for others. I try to avoid it. So am I even really a Christian? Or am I just kidding myself?”*

Are you troubled by your lack of love? That’s a good sign. It’s called contrition, repentance, sorrow over your sin. But don’t despair because there’s something more to look at than just your sins. God is looking at something more than that. That’s why John can write: **“This is how we shall know that we belong to the truth and how we shall assure our hearts before Him: ²⁰ For whenever our hearts condemn us, God is greater than our hearts and knows everything.”**

Did you catch that? **“God is greater than our hearts.”** That’s good news! Our heart may rightly condemn us. We haven’t loved as we ought. So, we bring our sins to God and confess them. But be reassured by this: **“God is greater than our hearts and knows everything.”** God sees the bigger picture. He sees the blood of Christ, who has died for our sins, forgives us, and cleanses us. That’s what God sees! So be reassured today! We **“belong to the truth”** because we are God’s baptised, blood-bought children. We trust in Christ and His love for our salvation. That’s what God sees, and He wants us to see it too.

Therefore, our hearts do not condemn us, and we have confidence before God. With that assurance, now we can see something other than our sins. Now, we can see God’s fatherly care in our lives, giving us what we need from day to day. Now we can see our risen Lord’s nail-marked hands and feet, showing us His love and giving us the sure hope of the resurrection of our bodies. Now, we can see God’s Spirit at work in our lives, giving us the ability to love that comes with being God’s baptised children. And with all that, then, now we can see clearly to notice our brother or sister in need, to look for ways to help, and then to do it.

If you want a good summary of the Christian life, here it is. John puts it like this: **“This is also His Commandment, that we should believe in the name of His Son, Jesus Christ and love one another as He has commanded us.”**

See those two aspects, one leading to the other. First, **“believe in the name of His Son, Jesus Christ.”** There is faith in Christ, who lays down His life in love, the love by which we are saved. And then **“love one another.”** There is the love with which we lay down our lives for others, the love we put into action when we serve our neighbour. Believe in Christ. Love one another. That’s it. That’s the Christian life in a nutshell.

Dear friends, God will equip you, and He will strengthen you to live that kind of love. He does it through the Word and Sacrament He gives you here in church. Your faith is strengthened as you come to His house every week to have your sins forgiven, to hear the preaching of the Gospel, and to receive the blessed Sacrament of Christ’s body and blood. Your faith is strengthened. And so is your love. As you come here every week, you are refreshed with God’s love, so you have a good supply to share with others. So be strengthened in faith toward God and in fervent love toward one another. Amen.

The peace of God which passes all understanding, keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.

PRAYER FOR THE FOURTH SUNDAY OF EASTER

Lord our God, we praise You for Your great goodness; and for the good things that You have prepared for those who love You! Grant that we may obtain those glories, which no human being has ever seen or heard or ever thought could happen, through Jesus Christ, Your holy Servant.

We thank You for sending Christ, the Good Shepherd, into our world, to lay down His life for the sheep, to pay the price of His blood to free us from the power of Satan, from the deserved results of our sins, and from the lifelong fear of death. We praise You also for His triumphant resurrection, and for the glorious promise that all who listen to His voice and follow Him will receive eternal life.

We thank You for His pity and love for us, who were straying and helpless like sheep without a shepherd, but who are now through Your great mercy brought back to fellowship with the true Shepherd and Keeper of our souls. We thank You For Your gracious forgiveness for all our sins, for Your promise of peace, for Your assurance of salvation, for Your presence and power in our lives, and for every gift in Christ Jesus.

Enable us, by Your grace, to follow the example of Jesus, our Saviour and Head, by seeking the lost, lifting up the fallen, strengthening the weary, rescuing the straying, feeding the poor, helping the suffering, sheltering the homeless, and being sensitive to each other's needs. May we thereby proclaim Your praises for calling us out of darkness into Your marvellous light.

Give us the voice and leadership of Jesus the Good Shepherd in all parliaments and councils of the nations, in commerce and industry, in all civic and social life. Frustrate all attempts to silence the Gospel message for reconciliation.

Direct our way through the sin, strife, and uncertainty of this age, O Lord. Give us true faith and godly hearts. Strengthen the sick, cheer the depressed, and supply the needy, showing that You are always ready to help in every trouble. Because our eyes have seen Your salvation, when our last hour comes, release Your servants in peace, and receive us into everlasting glory; through Jesus Christ Your Son, our risen Lord and Saviour. Amen.

Article: I Don't Go To Church Because The Church Is Full Of Hypocrites

How many times have you heard the following? "I don't go to church because the church is full of hypocrites!" I heard it again from someone this last week.

Tragically, there are thousands of people who won't darken the door of the church because they say that the church is full of hypocrites.

Now, it may be easy for us to get defensive over this accusation. However, we have to confess that this accusation is – right. Yes, you heard that correctly. The church is indeed full of a bunch of hypocrites. Take a look around the church on any given Sunday, and you will see a bunch of hypocrites. Every single one of us at church is a hypocrite.

But what about people who make this accusation? Aren't they hypocrites as well? Some may be, but most are not. Let me explain all of this.

In his Letter to the Romans, specifically chapter 6, Paul tells you and me that there are only two masters in this world; either a person is a slave to sin, or they are a slave to God (6:19-23). Either a person is in bondage to sin – under sin's rule and authority – or they are a bondservant to God – under God's rule and authority. There is no middle ground. There is no autonomous neutral position for anybody. There are only two teams – sin or God. And so, here is the reason why unbelievers are typically not hypocrites. An unbeliever is a slave to sin, which means that they do whatever they feel like doing while ignoring God. In other words, being a slave to sin means that you don't have to bother with right thinking or right living, or right anything for that matter. Unbelievers are not under the influence of righteousness; they neither have faith or the Holy Spirit, so they do whatever they want.

And so, it should not surprise us when unbelievers act and think like unbelievers. It is not hypocritical when a person who is enslaved to sin – sins. That is logically consistent. When ungodly people do ungodly things, they are acting and behaving just as we would expect.

However, what about us who consider ourselves to be Christians? Paul tells you and me that we have been freed from sin and enslaved to God. Through our Baptisms, you and I have been snatched from master sin and placed as bondservants of Christ. Through the mighty waters of baptism, Jesus is our Master. Righteousness is our gift. You and I have been freed from master sin and given the benefits of God's holiness and everlasting life. But this is where the problem arises. The world looks at you and me, and what do they see? They see hypocrites. And guess what? They are right. You and I have been freed from

master sin and placed under the Lord God to walk in perfect newness of life; however, we don't. Sure, you and I really want to do what is right, but we can't. We know perfectly well that we shouldn't sin, but we can't help ourselves. When we want to do good, we don't, and when we try not to do wrong, we do it anyway. And so, the world is right. We are a bunch of hypocrites. Don't deny it - we are. The unbelievers are right about us. Through our baptisms, we are servants of Christ, but our actions betray us – by our actions, it appears that we are servants of sin.

I don't have to convince you right now that this is a terrible predicament. It should bother you and me. How shall we resolve this?

Some 500 years ago, Martin Luther wrote in the 95 Theses that the entire life of believers should be repentance. In other words, repentance is not a prefabricated elaborate ritual. It is not something that can be bought at one time for all time. No, instead, repentance is a life-long project for all believers. It must be personal, it must be sincere, and it must take place throughout all of our lives. In a word, repentance acknowledges our hypocrisy. It acknowledges the inconsistency. You see, being a Christian is not about you and me chasing some moralistic carrot on a stick on a road to flawlessness. We are not trying to do good and be good to earn brownie points from God. We are not chasing perfection. Instead, we have been chased. Goodness is given as a gift. In other words, you don't do good work to become a Christian, but you do good works because you already are a Christian. Or, let's phrase it this way, you do not do good works to buy yourself out of sin's slavery, but you do good works because you have already been redeemed out of sin's slavery. And when we don't do good works? Well... that's the point - we repent.

In Romans 6, Paul stresses to you and me that being a Christian has never been about accumulating morality points and holding them before God to show that we are somehow worthy. No! Being a Christian is being snatched from master sin and delivered unto master Jesus. Being a Christian is a work of God - a divine rescue of you and me, where we are free from master sin, master death, and master evil.

And so, because we are freed from sin and because we belong to Jesus, we walk in newness of life. We walk in holiness. We walk in righteousness because we belong to the Righteous One – Jesus. But again, we don't always walk in righteousness. Instead, we often act as if we still belong to master sin. Like the prodigal son who left the goodness of his father's house for hellish living, like the prostitute Gomer (the unfaithful wife of Hosea) who abandoned her faithful

husband for prostitution, like a man looking intently looking in a mirror and then forgetting what he was like, and like a dog returning to its own vomit, we Christians are prone to wander and leave the God that loves us. We forget who we belong to, and we run back to master sin. We act like unbelievers when we in reality, we are baptised saints placed in God's goodness and holiness. Again, we are hypocrites.

What are we to do? Repent. Yes, you and I need to repent. Not just once but every single day - as often as we wander back to master sin.

But doesn't our Lord grow tired of this continual repentance?

We should find much comfort in the Psalms – hearing about the Old Testament saints repenting of their sins before God almighty. Consider King David for a moment. One day King David saw a woman bathing. He liked that woman. So, using his power as king, he slept with her, got her pregnant, and then got her husband killed. Master sin sure had its way with King David. And yet, in Psalm 51, David cries out, “Wash me thoroughly from my iniquity and declare me clean from my sin! For I acknowledge my rebellious acts, and my sin is always before me. Wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow! Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a steadfast spirit inside me!” (portions of Psalm 51).

In other words, David was brought to repentance. He acknowledged his sin with Bathsheba. And the Lord? The Lord did not despise David's repentance. In repentance, the Lord did not regard David with contempt but met David with divine mercy.

So hear this! Daily repentance is at the heart of the Christian life. It is hard to recognise our sins; it is hard to grieve for our horrible sins each day, and yet at the same time, while it is difficult for us to repent, God almighty and the angels of heaven rejoice greatly when we do. Yes, there is joy when we repent because, through the gifts of repentance and faith, we are centred right where we are supposed to be – in the Lord's grace and goodness.

While the world may accuse us of being hypocritical Christians, let us be so bold to confess our hypocrisies before God and a world that accuses, but then, let us be even bolder to hear and embrace Christ's amazing work on the cross, for we know that there is more forgiveness in Christ than there is hypocrisy in us. Yes, may we confess this day that there is no such thing as a perfect Christian but only forgiven Christians – forgiven Christians who have been freed from master sin and belong to God almighty.

Children's Message:

How many of you have a pet, like a dog or a cat? Raise your hand if you have a cat. If you have a pet, you love it, don't you! We also know that if we have pets, we need to take care of them.

We show our love for our pets by caring for them, don't we. How do we care for them? We feed them by giving them food. We make sure they have water to drink. We take time to play with them. If we have a dog, perhaps we take it for a walk. All of these things are ways we show our love for them.

What if you go away for a holiday and you can't take your pet with you? You have to find someone who can take care of your pet for you. You know your dog or cat. You love it. You know what your pet likes and how best to take care of it. So you hope that the person you leave it with will do a good job and not forget to feed it or give it water or check on it and play with it.

That gives us just a little idea of what Jesus means in our Gospel reading for today. Jesus tells us that He is our Good Shepherd. We are His sheep. We belong to Him. He knows us and loves us. That means He does everything He can to

take care of us lovingly and provide for us. As Jesus' sheep, we need Him to give us what we need to eat and drink. We need Him to protect us. We need Him to love us and pay attention to us. Jesus knows all these things we need from Him, and He always gives them to us.

But you know, Jesus, the Good Shepherd, loves us, His sheep, so much more than we love our pets. He loves us so much that He did for us what we'd never do for dogs or cats. Jesus knows that we need what our pets don't need: forgiveness of sins and life that lasts forever. And Jesus did what it took to provide those for us, His sheep. He died on the cross for us so that our sins are

forgiven. And He spends time with us, speaking to us through His Word, the Bible, to tell us that we're forgiven and that He'll love us forever and ever in heaven.

Let's thank Jesus for watching over us as the Good Shepherd caring for us, His sheep - especially for dying on the cross for us. *Thank You, Jesus, for being my Good Shepherd. When I wander off into sin, gently seek me out and bring me back to You! Amen.*



