

November 13, 2016 “The Great Price of Love” John 15:9-17

It has fallen out of fashion...to think of being Christian, as like being a soldier. As a result too much of Christian teaching is theoretical, that is, theological. As important as doctrine is, and I will be among the first to say it is important what we believe, the rubber meets the road at the point of how we believe, how we act as believers, how we conduct ourselves in the real world, with loved ones, friends, acquaintances, and enemies.

The portion I have read this morning is familiar to all of us. Especially, that 13th verse... “greater love has no man that this, that he lay down his life for his friends.” Such a thought does not arise in a vacuum. It is preceded by verses that are not terribly popular these days or in our current culture. For example, in the previous chapter, John 14 we find these words: “If you love me, you will obey what I command.” I said, being a disciple of Jesus is akin to being a soldier. Jesus told His followers in the clearest possible terms that HE required obedience of them. If you love me, if you care about who I am, if you feel for the Father in Heaven as I do, if you care deeply...you will obey what I tell you to do.

The current state of our society seems to me to be one in which we would rather talk about things, debating things rather than put our shoulders to the wheel and do some heavy lifting. Talking may feel safe, but sometimes what is required is action. Blood, sweat and tears. A year and a half ago when I was diagnosed with cancer I was sent for a cat scan, followed by a bone scan. When I got the results I was surprised by the way my surgeon described me. He confirmed the diagnosis of cancer. Then he added, “And you have arthritis in you right shoulder and your right hip. Normal really, for a man who has worked all his life.” What surprised me was his

2.

assumption (he knew I have been a preacher for close to 50 years) his assumption that I have always been involved in physical labour...pulling tree stumps, lifting heavy loads, shovelling, cutting wood and so on. Action leads to things like bruises, cuts and abrasions, blisters and calouses. Getting your hands dirty, and tearing untrimmed fingernails. There is no question that Jesus called for obedience, and HE meant us to be active. Found in action. Sometimes, on the front lines.

But the text for this morning is a tough one. “Greater love has no man (or woman for that matter), than that he or she lay down their life, for their friends.” This is tough talk. And we need to recall it when we find ourselves in tough places. This is a day, and begins a week when we turn our minds to the reality that there is a price to be paid if we are to live as we do in one of the free-est nations on the planet Earth. No, we cannot do anything we want without regard for others. In fact this freedom has been achieved and protected to a remarkable degree because...precisely because...we think about others in our midst, people who stand with us to our right and left. Young men and women have continually been willing to step forward and serve our country, often on foreign soil, and often in circumstances that were extremely dangerous.

Just putting on the uniform of our nation's army, navy, and air force, of our police forces and first responders, firemen, paramedics and so forth involves living by this principle which Jesus put into words. Service that is sacrificial. Service that causes some of us to say, “I wouldn't do that, or go there for love or money.” And yet people do. Those who serve our nation in uniform, and particularly our nation's warriors...have done this and do this still. Setting their own safety aside to serve the well being of friends,

3.

loved ones and strangers alike. And it is important that we take a moment to honour them, to think about them, to pray for them, and to count the cost of such devotion because there are always casualties, always. Jesus said, great love, for country, for brothers and sisters, for those whom we do not know well...involves sacrifice.

I recently had the privilege of watching the movie "Sully". You may remember the story. It was in all the papers and on all the newscasts. An American airlines pilot took off from the airport in New York City, and at 2,000 feet lost both of the airliner's engines due to bird strike. He had 208 seconds to solve the problem. The tower advised him to return to the airport. Sully knew the aircraft had neither the power nor the altitude to do so. He was advised to try for the nearest airport to his position. It was 7 miles away. And Sully knew that was too far as well. He made a decision. To set the airliner down on the Hudson River. And because he was an experienced pilot he knew that there had never been an air crash into water that had not lost all persons aboard. He made what many would think and did think was a crazy decision. It was in the month of January. Anyone in the water would survive for about three minutes. As the captain he took the craft down. He crashed on the river. And the result was that every passenger on board, every member of his crew survived. The miracle on the Hudson, they called it.

Certainly it was marvelous. Certainly his decision was a courageous one. His own life was on the line, as was his reputation as a pilot and his career with that airline. That plane was I am told worth about 40 million dollars. He lost the plane deliberately. That created a problem for the airline. And it certainly created a problem for the Insurance Company. Sully made decision in seconds that wound up saving 155 lives. And he made that decision without a

thought about what it could cost him personally. He was smart and he was brave. And his actions were sacrificial in nature.

Here is my point. Jesus said a lot about love. “Love your neighbour as yourself.” “As the Father (God) has loved me, so I have loved you (my followers). Remain in my love.” And then Jesus adds the phrases which are our text for today and this coming week. “No one has greater love than this, that (he or she) lay down their life for their friends.” The principle is that loving people always comes at a price, and that price is always self sacrifice. We have seen that lived out in the manner in which our nation's heroes in uniform have served in times of war. We have seen that lived out in times in which our heroes in uniform have tried to share the difficult cause of peace as well. The point is that love is given and love is shared by people who are willing to sacrifice their own wellbeing, their own ambitions, to see other people benefite.

Surely the everyday example is the parent and parents who care for their children. They do a hundred little things that simply put the well being of their children first. They work longer days than they would choose if it were simply about themselves. It is not. We see it in a host of volunteers working to give refugees a chance in a new land and at a new life where the world does not explode, where shrapnel does not wound and endanger, where landmines are not going off every day...in some cases every hour. The cost of being loving involves being willing to do things, to act, to take action that could cost you your life, your health, your well being. Jesus said it...and it is so obviously true. Love is sacrificial in nature. Great love, can demand the ultimate sacrifice, life itself.

And of course Jesus is not just spinning an idea out here.

5.

This is not Philosophy 101 in a classroom at the University. He is involved in this very lifestyle HIMSELF. He is talking. He is walking with HIS friends. HE is teaching them. But HE is also acting. HIS shoulder is to the wheel, and to a wheel, that only HE can raise out of the mire and the mud. He is on his last journey. It takes HIM to Jerusalem. It's chosen goal is Calvary, where HE will be crucified. He did rise the 3rd day but to this singular purpose of saving men and women and children and young people from their sinfulness. That they might be able to love others, as HE has loved others. To sacrifice themselves for others, as HE did. And yes it has to do with saving lives. Changing the world. Making love the active principle behind and in all human relationships. And yes, that takes a measure of faith too.

This is a season for remembering. My father in law died of cancer in 1990. This week is one in which I remember him as a man barely out of his teens. He was slogging through Holland and Belgium and literally walking to Germany to save the world from the Nazi war machine that wanted to take it all. Our family's greatest treasure is a photograph. We do not even know who took it. But he is sitting in a cafe drinking a glass of wine. He is in uniform. There are no weapons in sight. What we will be remembering over the next few days is that he was putting his life on the line for his family back home, for his nation, for the wife he would eventually marry, for the children he would eventually have and their families. He was laying down his life for his friends. Those who were a world away, and those with whom he marched and fought. And while he would never call himself a religious man, he would do those things best described in the words of Jesus... "Greater love has no one than this, that he lay down his life for his friends."

Let us pray;

Lord we thank you for men and women who have served this nation in its hour of need in the past, and who are still serving others sacrificially. Today we remember those serving in our armed forces at home and abroad. We also remember our first responders, whose work is serving the communities in which they work and live. We remember as we promised to do, those who lost their lives serving sacrificially. Grant that we may value life and living in our times, and be worthy of those who have gone before us, including your Son, our Saviour and Lord, Jesus Christ. Amen