

April 26, 2015

Acts 4:5-12

5 The next day the leaders, elders, and legal experts gathered in Jerusalem, 6 along with Annas the high priest, Caiaphas, John, Alexander, and others from the high priest's family. 7 They had Peter and John brought before them and asked, "By what power or in what name did you do this?" 8 Then Peter, inspired by the Holy Spirit, answered, "Leaders of the people and elders, 9 are we being examined today because something good was done for a sick person, a good deed that healed him? 10 If so, then you and all the people of Israel need to know that this man stands healthy before you because of the name of Jesus Christ the Nazarene—whom you crucified but whom God raised from the dead. 11 This Jesus is the stone you builders rejected; he has become the cornerstone! 12 Salvation can be found in no one else. Throughout the whole world, no other name has been given among humans through which we must be saved."

Psalm 23

1 The LORD is my shepherd. I lack nothing. 2 He lets me rest in grassy meadows; he leads me to restful waters; 3 he keeps me alive. He guides me in proper paths for the sake of his good name. 4 Even when I walk through the darkest valley, I fear no danger because you are with me. Your rod and your staff— they protect me 5 You set a table for me right in front of my enemies. You bathe my head in oil; my cup is so full it spills over! 6 Yes, goodness and faithful love will pursue me all the days of my life, and I will live in the LORD's house as long as I live.

1 John 3:16-24

16 This is how we know love: Jesus laid down his life for us, and we ought to lay down our lives for our brothers and sisters. 17 But if a person has material possessions and sees a brother or sister in need and that person doesn't care—how can the love of God remain in him? 18 Little children, let's not love with words or speech but with action and truth. 19 This is how we will know that we belong to the truth and reassure our hearts in God's presence. 20 Even if our hearts condemn us, God is greater than our hearts and knows all things. 21 Dear friends, if our hearts don't condemn us, we have confidence in relationship to God. 22 We receive whatever we ask from him because we keep his commandments and do what pleases him. 23 This is his commandment, that we believe in the name of his Son, Jesus Christ, and love each other as he commanded us. 24 The person who keeps his commandments remains in God and God remains in him; and this is how we know that he remains in us, because of the Spirit that 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 hand sees the wolf coming, he leaves the sheep and runs away. That's because he isn't the shepherd; the sheep aren't really his. So the wolf attacks the sheep and scatters them. 13 He's only a hired hand and the sheep don't matter to him. 14 "I am the good shepherd. I know my own sheep and they know me, 15 just as the Father knows me and I know the Father. I give up my life for the sheep. 16 I have other sheep that don't belong to this sheep pen. I must lead them too. They will listen to my voice and there will be one flock, with one shepherd. 17 "This is why the Father loves me: I give

up my life so that I can take it up again. 18 No one takes it from me, but I give it up because I want to. I have the right to give it up, and I have the right to take it up again. I received this commandment from my Father."

Sermon

Grace to you and peace from God our Father,
God's Son our Lord Jesus Christ, and the Holy Spirit:
Amen.

“Let’s not love with words or speech but with action and truth.” Whoo. Wow. What a breath of fresh air. Though John wrote this letter about two thousand years ago, these words seem to sum up the desires of many in our culture, for an active love, one that fills our lungs and our souls. That our actions might match the feelings in our hearts and the words on our lips. Let's not love with words or speech but with action and truth.

Of course, we want this active love because it seems so absent in our world today, and in the

church as well. The accusations of hypocrisy, of being two faced, of saying one thing and doing another are all too prevalent, and all too often, all too true. Our already fragile relationships seem continually assailed because the people supposed to look out for us, to protect us, to care for us instead act as though we don't matter. And if we're honest with ourselves, we too don't act in ways that reflect our loves, our commitments, and our responsibilities. The hypocrites aren't just out there in the ether. They're here within our hearts as well. Our world seems riddled with relics of broken love. And yet, we receive this call, to not love with words or speech but with action and truth.

Here in this Easter season, we're exploring the dynamics of the resurrection. In other words, we're asking what the resurrection means for our daily life, asking what's the resurrection Jesus all about. Last week, we looked at how the resurrection speaks to the value of our bodies, about how Jesus' physical body carries our bodies into God's Kingdom. If you missed that and want to hear more, it's available on our website. This week, we're taking a look at the active nature of the resurrection. In particular, we see that the resurrection is about love in action.

In his imagery of the Good Shepherd, Jesus talks about just this, about love in action. Jesus tells us that we see a good shepherd when we see the one who's willing to lay down his life for the sheep. This

shepherd lives out the love of the sheep by protecting them from wolves, by finding the sheep who wander away, by sacrificing herself to give the sheep a chance at new life. What makes this shepherd good is because this shepherd acts out of love for the sheep. The good shepherd doesn't love with just words or speech but with action and truth. Jesus is this Good Shepherd.

Relatively recently, the phrase "Love out loud" has become a common way to capture this idea of active love, of noticeable love. People as different as televangelist Joyce Meyer to youth minister Doug Fields use the term. Jaci Velasquez released an album in 2008 called Love Out Loud, and a pop band even adopted that as their name. There's a

yearning out there for active love, for love that makes a difference, that catches our attention, that speaks to us, that loves out loud. We want love in action.

Perhaps this movement, this desire to see and hear love out loud, arose also because deep within us, we fear that we're unloved. So much of our culture tells us that we're not good enough. Either too skinny or too fat, too much of a jock or too much of a nerd, too talkative or too quiet, never ideal, never sufficient, never, never good enough. And we internalize that stuff, that no one could love us.

All too often, the students I come into contact within campus ministry live in this fear, in this distorted belief that no one could love them. If you look at the

hookup culture so common to campuses across the country, where one night stands become much more common than committed relationships, this indicates not only a casualization of sexuality, but even more problematic, a distancing from intimacy. And this isn't just true of women or of men, nor of just college students. You can see people of all genders, all ages, and all walks of life intentionally keeping relationships shallow, preventing deep levels of knowing one another. Why? Because we all want to love and to be loved, but even more than that, we fear that people will not love us as we want, as we need. We fear that our vulnerability will only be met with abandonment. We fear that love is beyond us, and so we seclude ourselves from disappointment.

In this isolation, both self-propelled and simultaneously imposed by others, we find ourselves continually alone. Of course, this shouldn't shock us, and yet, the dissatisfaction of our loneliness seeps in quickly. We want to be loved, and yet we're afraid we're unlovable. So we create these cells, these prisons, these tombs of loneliness, where we think that we're somehow dead from the danger of love.

And then, Jesus breaks through not only his death, but through the death of love in our culture, through the tombs we've entered out of fear and through the tomb that held him in his own death. Jesus rises to life and brings love in action. The kind of love that doesn't just speak empty words but the kind that lays down his life for the sheep, and the kind of

love that never leaves those sheep alone but rises from the grave to bring life, and light, and love in action. Love that won't die! Love that won't remain bound by the tomb's isolation, love that risks intimacy and vulnerability beyond our deepest fears. Love that lives the Gospel. That's what Jesus is all about, that's the resurrection in action. Breaking open the doors of Christ's tomb and our tombs of fear that we might never be alone, but instead find ourselves alive in love, living love ourselves.

This is what Jesus does, but what can we, the church, the Body of Christ, do in the midst of this culture that abandons love? What might we have to offer as a witness to the kind of love that rose from the grave?

Little children, let's not love with words or speech but with action and truth. That's what we may do, that's what God calls us to do in light of the resurrection. When people think that they're unlovable, we show them differently with our words and actions. When people find themselves locked inside prisons, isolated from love, we may liberate them with actions of love. When people create tombs that seek to silence love, we may live love so loudly that our actions shout the resurrection of Jesus, that there is a love that won't forsake us, that there is a love that penetrates even our longest loneliness, that nothing, no heights or depths or angels or demons can separate us from God's love.

There's so much in our world that needs this kind of active love. Just yesterday, a massive earthquake struck Nepal, 7.8 in magnitude, and took the lives of over 2,200 people and destroyed inconceivable amounts of infrastructure. As a church, we've been collecting supplies for Lutheran World Relief personal care kits so that, when disasters like this strike, people know that there's an active love that wants not only their survival, but to support new life out of the imminence of death. So far, we've gathered enough items for about thirty five kits. Over this next week, I invite you to put our love in action and gather enough for another thirty five. Drop off the items we need – combs, bath towels, bath size bar soaps, nail clippers, and toothbrushes – here at the church so

that those in Nepal might have at least a small witness that there's a love in action for them.

People here in our community need to see us love out loud as well. One of our middle school principals recently shared with me that he's concerned that because so many parents work so many hours that many kids spend hours after school without family support. We've begun exploring ways we can partner with the middle school and the library to provide some informal mentoring and relationship building so that, by our actions, students in Radford will know that they are loved. In that vein, a Thrivent grant Emilie received enabled us to get two brand new 7" Kindle Fires to help with tutoring

and mentoring. If you have any ideas or would like to join us in this, please let me know.

We have other opportunities to love out loud, to love in word and deed. You may want to join with Highlander Lutherans or Across the Spectrum, with collecting food for Beans and Rice, all ways that we as a church love out loud. But whatever we do, we can't let love stop with our words. That's what makes the Gospel so powerful. Jesus didn't just tell us that we're loved, but used his life to heal us, to forgive us, to feed us and free us, to bring us companionship in our isolation, to rise from the dead so that even death might not prevent us from knowing love. So as the images of God in the world, we too must love not only with our words, but with the ways that we live our

lives. Let us not love with only words or speech, but like Jesus, love with action and truth. The resurrection is about love in action. God's love, and ours. Amen.