

# Stretching Toward Sunday

Thoughts, readings and reflections  
based on this week's lectionary readings

April 26, 2015

Fourth Sunday after Easter, Year B

The readings this week:

◦ Acts 4:5-12 ◦ Psalm 23

◦ 1 John 3:16-24 ◦ John 10:11-18

[Click here to read this week's Scriptures](#)

## What's the Catch?

Whatever we ask we receive. Isn't that what the words say? Well, yes, but if you take only that little twitterish sound bite, you miss the entire point of the passage. If you take only those few words, you might as well be describing God as driving some heavenly-pie-in-the-sky ice cream truck through your neighborhood dispensing treats to the kiddos. No, the author of this epistle is not preaching an easy prosperity gospel designed to appeal to arm chair disciples. This preacher is talking about sacrificial love and stewardship.

That lovely subordinating conjunction "because" links the two parts of the sentence and provides a cause and effect relationship between the two ideas. So, yes, there is a "catch" to the idea that we receive from God whatever we ask. The catch is that we receive whatever we ask because we are in line with God's will. A disciple who follows the will and way of God will not ask selfishly to please him or herself, and will not treat the Divine One as a genie in a liturgical bottle.

The whole idea behind this week's reading from 1 John, and indeed the entire book, is that in the sacrificial love of Christ we see and experience God; in doing so we are compelled to live out that love in word and deed. The evangelist makes it clear, "We know love by this, that he laid down his life for us—and we ought to lay down our lives for one another" (vs. 16). There is a wonderful mutuality at play here, a cause and effect that produces quite an effect.

God's love is made real in Jesus and in the way the Son of God lives and loves, in fact loving us to death and beyond. This is powerful, heady stuff, this kind of love. It is not an "I'll scratch your back if you'll scratch mine" kind of affair; this is love poured out without regard to the cost. This is love that demands no return and love that will not let a needy sister or brother go without help. This is the kind of love practiced by Mother Teresa, by St. Augustine, by

countless missionaries and servant leaders, and by ordinary disciples like you and me.

What does it mean to lay down our lives for another? We may never be called to give up our physical lives for others, but it might happen. We are called to put our own wants aside to do what we can to meet the needs of others, to share the burden, to alleviate pain and suffering when and where we can. It means looking at one's glass as always full enough to share, as being content with enough and not hoarding our time, our talents, or our possessions.

To lay down our lives for one another means that as we live in community we work at the hard parts of being together and staying together. It may mean that we "shut up and put up" for the good of the body. It might mean taking the back seat and letting someone else drive for awhile. We don't pack up our little red wagons and go home at the first sign of discord or at the expense of our neighbor.

God loves us pure and simple, flaws and all, and it is this gracious love that frees us to love others. This knowledge of God's love and grace, if we allow it, can so fill us that we are able to pour ourselves out for others without worrying that there won't be enough love (or anything else, for that matter) left for us.

Yes, there is a catch. The catch is love, and it is highly infectious. Once we truly experience the love of God in Christ Jesus, we are compelled to spread it however imperfectly, in thought, word, and deed. Go fellow disciples; live in lavish love, pouring yourselves out for one another for the sake of the gospel. You have nothing to lose and everything to gain.

Sharon R.  
Blezard,  
[Stewardship of  
Life](#)



# Reflecting on the Word



## 1st Reading: [Acts 4:5-12](#)

What has upset the religious leaders? What action did they take? Just a few weeks have passed since Annas and Caiaphas had been involved in the condemnation of Jesus. In his response to their question "By what power or what name did you say do this?" Peter is forcing them to encounter Jesus again. What does Peter say about him? When has your faith been challenged by others? Imagine that you had been in a group of believers John and Peter returned to and told of what had happened. What would have been your reaction? [Quiet Time Bible Study, InterVarsity Press](#)

## Psalm Reading: [Psalm 23](#)

There are two large metaphors in the psalm: the shepherd and the host. Compare and contrast these two images. Look carefully at the shepherd. How exactly does he care for his sheep? "I fear no evil" is a bold statement. What does it mean for you to say that? Look carefully at the host. How exactly does he provide for his guest? What is the most comforting thing that you have experienced in the life of faith? Psalm 23 is a weapon against fear. What fear in your life will you go to war against with this prayer as your cannon? [Quiet Time Bible Study, InterVarsity Press](#)



Love binds and builds, heals and hallows, redeems and restores....

The Holy One leads us beside still waters and restores our souls, whether we are Gentiles, eunuchs, or the homeless of Detroit. This power of life originates from God in every moment, forming living, healthy relationships.

God chose to enter history and love us. We must choose to love others and head into a world that doesn't like those who love unconditionally.

An excerpt from [Choosing to Love](#), Robert Roth, Sojourners

## Praying Toward Sunday

*Good Shepherd, Teach us to follow you to care for all that are close to us, to protect those who are threatened, to welcome those who are rejected, to forgive those who are burdened by guilt, to heal those who are broken and sick, to share with those who have little or nothing, to take the time to really know one another and love as you have loved us.*

*Good Shepherd, Teach us to follow you to spread compassion to those who are far away, to speak for those who are voiceless, to defend those who are oppressed and abused, to work for justice for those who are exploited, to make peace for those who suffer violence, to take the time to recognise our connectedness, and to love as you have loved us.*

*Good Shepherd, Teach us to follow you and to be faithful to calling you gave us to be shepherds in your name.*

—John van de Laar, © 2009 Sacredise.com

## 3rd Reading: [1 John 3:16-24](#)

Who was your closest friend when you were a kid? Why did you connect with them so well? What was a time when you wanted to connect to someone more deeply, but fear held you back from trying? What was the fear that held you back or prevented you from leaning all the way in (Rejection? Lack of confidence? Unsure how?)? What are some of the fears that keep Christians from taking the initiative to create and cultivate the kind of community addressed in Acts 2 and 1 John 3? Why is it so important to connect deeply with other followers of Jesus? How do we find the confidence necessary to "make the first move"? What one step could you take this week toward starting or nurturing a relationship with another Christian? [Bellevue Presbyterian Church](#)

## 4th Reading: [John 10:11-18](#)

What do you think it means that the Good Shepherd knows his sheep and the sheep know the Good Shepherd? What does it mean to hear the Shepherd's voice? How is that distinction different than other perspectives of faith in God? Read Psalm 23...what are ways that the Lord cares for the sheep in this passage? List the ways you see the Shepherd caring for the sheep... Jesus says several times that the Good Shepherd lays down his life for his sheep, what does that mean to you? Was Jesus forced to do this? Who are the sheep that are from another pen? [Christ the King Lutheran Church](#)