

ONE FLOCK  
[written in oral form]

I John 3:16-24; John 10:11-16  
Easter 4, Year B

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There are some similarities with the John and First John passages.

Both include the aspiration of giving all in love and service, as Jesus did. The phrase used for that is to "lay down our lives for one another."

This is a complete commitment / being all in without reservations.

Jesus lived God's love, and it was a total outpouring of love for others.

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The First John text quickly connects this with sharing our resources and possessions.

Listen again to the challenge in verse 17:

"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 to help?"

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The passage continues with the call to Love in truth and action and to follow the way and teachings of Jesus.

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Reinhold Niebuhr made a poignant observation in his book "a Tamed Cynic."

It is:

"The church does not seem to realize how unethical a conventionally respectable life may be."

Let me say that again:

"The church does not seem to realize how unethical a conventionally respectable life may be."

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I will rephrase this.

Following Christ does not lead us to the comfortable, affluent life, but we are there.

So, how did that happen?

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Are we withholding too much for ourselves?

Are we hoarding?

Are we completely committed to following Christ or is this a part time endeavor,.... and is that acceptable?

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I will let that sink in and will leave it there.

My focus is primarily on the John 10 text.

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The common Biblical metaphor of shepherd is used, with the added clarification of "Good" shepherd.

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These days, around here, we do not have shepherds. I have known three sheep farmers, but they really are not shepherds.

We could insert the "Good parent", yet most of us church folks have a decent understanding of the Biblical shepherd.

So, I will go with that analogy.

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As in First John, we are presented with the total love and devotion that could mean laying down one's life for others.

This commitment is way beyond serving others from guilt, duty or for reward, such as gratification.

We are told that the shepherd knows the sheep in the protected fold. The shepherd knows the followers and they know the good shepherd.

That makes sense.

However, verse 16 may turn our preconceptions upside down. It may challenge our sense of privilege and entitlement.

Moreover, the message may also calm our fears and insecurities, too.

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Verses 16:

"I have other sheep that do not belong to this fold. I must bring them also, and they will listen to my voice. So there will be one flock, one shepherd." [ ]

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There are those outside of the fold, ... and they hear the divine voice.

The good shepherd, and I'll shift this to God, God is concerned about those outside and seeks to bring them to safety.

No doubt, there are risks, hazards and dangers being separated from God and God's loving community.

Parents of young adults who have drifted away from the church often worry about their children.

Yet, be reassured, God is with them and they hear God.

We church people / we in the fold do not hold God captive.

God connects with and reaches out to all sorts of people.

Therefore, we dare not be smug and think we have a lock on God's devotion.

God is pretty big and amazing. Love is like that.

Moreover, this should give us pause about judging / dismissing anyone who is outside our community and expectations.

There is one flock and one God.  
However, there are those outside the fold.

Here is a true story about one such person outside of the fold.

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In the fall of 1987, I sat with holy expectation in my first seminary class. It was a New Testament class, and it was the professor's first experience as an instructor.

She began class by asking all of us to do 2 things:

1, Write a couple of paragraphs about ourselves so that she could more quickly get to know us.

*I think she missed her calling of being an elementary teacher. I was waiting for her to ask us to write about our summer vacation, when she said the second request.*

The 2<sup>nd</sup> request was to "covenant" with the persons on our left and right to become friends.

She sought an honourable goal. It was inclusiveness and in the pursuit of community building.

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The person on my right was David, a tall, extremely quiet, scholarly type, who was from South Carolina.

The person on my left was BRENT.

Brent was a mix of Bill Murray, Jim Carey and the dark side of Pee Wee Herman.

He was a short wiry, obnoxious .... WEIRD guy.

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Here is an example of his character:

for his 2 paragraph autobiography, he plagiarized the Steve Martin movie, "the Jerk" and wrote that he was born a poor white boy, raised on a cotton farm in Arkansas, by an African-American family, and so forth.

*He was actually a middle class, red head, raised on a cattle farm in Winfield Kansas.*

We each read our brief autobiography.

As Brent read his, the rest of us tried to hold our laughter.

The sad thing is... the professor believed him, ...until he openly and laughingly confessed the truth, in class, the following week.

*I think that practical joke hurt his grade a lot.*

Brent was obnoxious to the point of pleading for rejection. Yet, I was determined to fulfill my covenant and be his friend, .... *I just had not figured out how.*

David, on the other hand, was a blessing. He had a gentle and kind nature. He was the type of person, I would choose as a friend. And, we are still close friends. He was easy to befriend.

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Brent,..in contrast,.. would be a good candidate to be a poster child for planned parenthood.

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A couple of weeks after I met Brent, I received an “official” letter, on Seminary Paper, from the vice president of **Student Affairs**.

The letter said there was an issue of great concern, and I should meet her at 2:00 o’clock the next day.

So, I skipped class... went to her office with some trepidation and discovered, with immense embarrassment... that she did not send the letter.

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Later that day, Brent, with a smirk, asked me, “How was Vice President Lambert? He wrote the letter as a hoax.

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That I learned, was typical Brent.

In addition to being a jokester, Brent was a lecher, and he constantly wondered why women never would go out on a second date with him.

*Word about Brent’s inappropriate dating behaviour*, spread rapidly, and before long.... Brent could not even get a first date.

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One evening, in a humble introspective moment, Brent shared his frustration with me, and asked, “why am I so unsuccessful with women?”

Gathering all my pastoral care compassion, I responded,

“Brent, IT IS BECAUSE YOU REEK SLEAZE. You have one thing on your mind,...and you do not respect women!”

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*Hey... Part of being a friend is being honest!*

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I could, but I won’t, spend hours telling “Brent” stories, such as the time I bailed him out of jail, or the time they banned him from using Seminary equipment because he jumped out of a maintenance van while it was still in gear.

The van hit 3 parked cars.

In addition, Brent frequently hired prostitutes.

Brent was outside of the flock.

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Somehow, Brent became my friend.

People would comment to me, “I can’t believe you’re his friend.” “Why are you?”

I knew it was more than a covenant made in class.

He was authentic. I think I admired that.  
What you saw was who he was.

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Most people were amazed that Brent was a seminary student. He did not look the part or fit the model. He was not a preacher boy, and I cannot imagine any church that would want him as pastor.

*He was too open and honest.*

In fact, most churches would not want him as a member!

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He had no intention of going into ministry.  
He was merely interested in theology.

Even so, when we volunteered together at the inner city homeless shelter, I noticed he had a real knack for helping them. Maybe it was because he could better relate to them?  
Brent was outside of the fold, and so were they.

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Inside the fold is a sheltered, protected and comfortable place.  
Those in the fold feel safe and assured. In the fold life is under control and it feels righteous.

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After graduating from seminary, Brent was able to get full time work at the homeless shelter. The pay was not great, but he was provided with a room to call home.

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Three years later, Brent was heading to the shelter late one evening. He was driving through a "rough" part of town, when he noticed a young lady about 16 standing on a corner, visibly out of place, alone in that dangerous part of town.

Brent pulled his car over and parked it close to where she was.  
His intentions / aspirations were Not pure.  
He went up to her and asked her what she was doing there and if he could help.

She was very upset and said, she and her boyfriend had a fight and he dumped her there.  
She had called a taxi, and was waiting for it.

Brent said to her, "This is not a safe place.  
I will wait here with you, until the Taxi comes."  
Brent sat down on the sidewalk, leaning next to the building she was standing by, and waited with her.

A few minutes later, a stranger rounded the corner, looked the two over, and then pulled out a gun and started yelling threats – including a demand for money.

Still sitting against the wall, Brent revealed his empty wallet. He pulled out his car keys to show his pockets were empty, too.

The man screamed more threats.  
Brent then yelled to the girl to run to the bar down the road.

The stranger opted not to give chase, but instead turned around to face Brent who was starting to get up.

While standing over Brent, he shot Brent in the face, then he took Brent's car keys and fled away in his car.

The bullet entered above his left eye and exited his jaw, and lodged in his shoulder.

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Brent recovered, minus vision in one eye, but he gained a bullet in the shoulder; it was not removed.

Brent, with all his faults, demonstrated God's love,.. at great risk, .. to a lonely scared person. He was willing to lay down his life for another.

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To most people Brent was someone on the outside / someone to exclude and ostracize. That night,..... to that young lady.... he was a saviour.

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God can use what is real--our true self.

God is busy connecting, reaching out and talking to those on the outside. Maybe we do not see it from inside the fold?

Maybe God is more active outside?

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I wonder if following Christ means going outside the fold?

Perhaps, it means offering ourselves in love for others?