

## **“Ice Bucket Challenge”**



The Rev. Ryan Wiksell

April 21, 2024 | 4<sup>th</sup> Sunday of Easter

St. Michael's Episcopal Church

Independence, MO

May I speak with the Breath of God, from the Word of God, in the Name of God.

*I lay down my life for the sheep. 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. For this reason the Father loves me, because I lay down my life in order to take it up again. No one takes it from me, but I lay it down of my own accord. I have power to lay it down, and I have power to take it up again.*

- When we read the promises of Jesus, we see them in two phases.
  - 1: As encouraging words for our past and present.
  - 2: As challenging words for our present and future. I can't tell you what phase you should be in. In fact, most of us go back and forth. But once we have sat in the encouragement of Jesus' promises long enough, we are always called to go back to that well and respond to the challenge.
- And the challenge is always this: Go and do likewise.
  - Remember the Ice Bucket Challenge? It's a little like that.
  - There are lots of short videos on the internet of people doing crazy things
  - Same with the Ice Bucket Challenge. But in this case, after the crazy things are done, they call out someone else to go and do likewise.
- "I lay down my life for the sheep. Now you lay down your life for the sheep."
  - I take up my life again. Now you take up your life again.
  - God has given Jesus the power to lay it down and take it up again.
  - God has given you the power to lay it down and take it up again.
- This is exactly what John is telling us in the 1 John reading
  - "We know love by this, that he laid down his life for us-- and we ought to lay down our lives for one another. 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 help?"
  - I preached about that recently. Love is not an abstract concept. It is a choice. It is an action.

- In Acts we see Peter taking up the challenge
  - Behaving an awful lot like Jesus did during his ministry
  - Seeing a need. Meeting a need. And pointing people to the work of the Holy Spirit, working in him, and working in them.
- Maybe you are in the receiving phase
  - You've been discouraged by the world. Sometimes we are the victims of overwhelming discouragement and mistreatment and trauma
  - You need to receive Jesus' love, and his promises for forgiveness and restoration and peace.
- Maybe you are in the challenge phase
  - Be honest with yourself. Have you been healed? Have you been blessed? Have you been encouraged by God's presence here? Have you been supported by the community here?
  - Then you're in the challenge phase.
  - And the only question is, what is the nature of that challenge?
- Some challenges are very unique: tailor-made to your strengths and your story
  - We are recognizing Volunteers for just that reason today
  - There are so many different kinds of Volunteers that make this place run.
  - *RECOGNIZE VOLUNTEERS*
- Some challenges are common to all
  - We are all challenged to approach the Scriptures with curiosity and diligence
  - We are all challenged to gather together, and to receive the body and blood with introspection and worship
  - We are all challenged to pray, even though our individual prayers may sound very different.
- It's always dicey when a preacher starts talking about money

- You may have even heard it said that when you give to God, you can expect your blessings to be multiplied in return
- But that's not really the God I know
- The God I know doesn't promise blessings as a reward
  - God asks us to look around and see the blessings we already have
  - And then we are all challenged to give out of our abundance—to recognize how much we've been given and to turn around and make that happen for others
  - If our blessings are then multiplied as a result, it's only because we've shown that we don't feel entitled to them.
- You've heard it said, the more you give, the more you receive
  - Let's think of it the other way around. The more we receive, the more we're able to give.
  - Whether that's to a person in need, a charity, a school, or to your parish, that's beside the point.
  - The point is... Gratitude.
  - We have the Good News. We know what God has done for us.
  - And now we're being called out. To not only feel gratitude. But show it.
  - To accept that proverbial Ice Bucket Challenge
  - But in this case, to lay down our lives for others.
  - How do we do that? By dying? No.
  - Rather, by no longer living for our own sake. But living our lives for the sake of those who need us.
  - By looking intently at the life of Jesus, then closing the book, and walking away, to "go and do likewise."
  - Amen.

\* **Collect of the Day**      Fourth Sunday of Easter

Celebrant      The Lord be with you.

**People**      **And also with you.**

Celebrant      Let us pray. O God, whose Son Jesus is the good shepherd of your people: Grant that when we hear his voice we may know him who calls us each by name, and follow where he leads; who, with you and the Holy Spirit, lives and reigns, one God, for ever and ever.  
*Amen.*

**First Lesson** Acts 4:5-12

The rulers, elders, and scribes assembled in Jerusalem, with Annas the high priest, Caiaphas, John, and Alexander, and all who were of the high-priestly family. When they had made the prisoners stand in their midst, they inquired, "By what power or by what name did you do this?"

Then Peter, filled with the Holy Spirit, said to them, "Rulers of the people and elders, if we are questioned today because of a good deed done to someone who was sick and are asked how this man has been healed, let it be known to all of you, and to all the people of Israel, that this man is standing before you in good health by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, whom you crucified, whom God raised from the dead. This Jesus is 'the stone that was rejected by you, the builders; it has become the cornerstone.' There is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among mortals by which we must be saved."

The Word of the Lord. **Thanks be to God.**

## Psalm 23

The Lord is my shepherd; \*

I shall not be in want.

He makes me lie down in green pastures \*

and leads me beside still waters.

He revives my soul \*

and guides me along right pathways for his Name's sake.

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 spread a table before me in the presence of those who trouble me; \*

you have anointed my head with oil, and my cup is running over.

Surely your goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life, \*

and I will dwell in the house of the Lord for ever.

## Second Lesson 1 John 3:16-24

We know love by this, that he laid down his life for us-- and we ought to lay down our lives for one another. 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 help?

Little children, let us love, not in word or speech, but in truth and action. And by this we will know that we are from the truth and will reassure our hearts before him whenever our hearts condemn us; for God is greater than our hearts, and he knows everything. Beloved, if our hearts do not condemn us, we have boldness before God; and we receive from him whatever we ask, because we obey his commandments and do what pleases him.

And this is his commandment, that we should believe in the name of his Son Jesus Christ and love one another, just as he has commanded us. All who obey his commandments abide in him, and he abides in them. And by this we know that he abides in us, by the Spirit that he has given us.

The Word of the Lord. **Thanks be to God.**

### \* Sequence

*"My Savior Will Supply My Need"*

Hymnal #664

### \* Holy Gospel

John 10:11-18

Celebrant The Holy Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ, according to John

**People Glory to you, Lord Christ.**

Jesus said, "I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep. The hired hand, who is not the shepherd and does not own the sheep, sees the wolf coming and leaves the sheep and runs

away—and the wolf snatches them and scatters them. The hired hand runs away because a hired hand does not care for the sheep.

I am the good shepherd. I know my own and my own know me, just as the Father knows me and I know the Father. And I lay down my life for the sheep. 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.

For this reason the Father loves me, because I lay down my life in order to take it up again. No one takes it from me, but I lay it down of my own accord. I have power to lay it down, and I have power to take it up again. I have received this command from my Father.”

Celebrant      The Gospel of the Lord

**People      Praise to you, Lord Christ.**