

**ALL FOR SOME DUMB SHEEP**

**The Reverend David O. Guss, Pr.**

**Bethlehem Lutheran Church  
Hallandale, FL**

**St. Mark's Lutheran Church  
Coral Gables, FL**

**St. Timothy Lutheran Church  
Miami Gardens, FL**

**April 22, 2018 – 4<sup>th</sup> Sunday of Easter**

**Children's Message:** *Jesus Loves Me This I Know*

**Object:** a name tag with your name on it

**Scripture:** John 10:11-18; Acts 4:5-12

**Hymns: Pro:** *All Heaven Declares* **Rec:** *Love Crucified Arose!*

Do you know what this is? This is a name tag. It has my name on it. If I forget who I am, all I have to do is look down and I will know who I am. Sometimes we wear name tags when we are in a group of people so other people will know who we are. Names are important, aren't they? When you were born, one of the first things your parents did was give you a name.

I read about a town in Texas - Clark, Texas - that agreed to change its name to Dish, Texas. That's because the Dish satellite television offered to give everyone in town a free Dish satellite TV for the next 10 years if they agreed to change the name of their town. Names are important.

There is 1 name according to the Bible that is more important than any other name and that is the *name of Jesus*. Think about it. When we pray, we pray *in Jesus' name*, don't we? In the Bible the disciples healed people *in Jesus' name*. And, someday, the Bible says, everyone on earth will bow down *at the name of Jesus*. That's a powerful name. But, you know the most wonderful thing about Jesus, even more wonderful than his name. It is that he loves you and me and everyone on earth. "*Jesus loves me this I know for the Bible tells me so ...*" Always remember to pray and do good things *in Jesus' name* and remember how much Jesus loves you. Amen.

DEAR LORD: Thank you, Lord, for loving us so much, *in Jesus' name* we pray. Amen.

AND, MAY THE PEACE OF GOD WHICH PASSES ALL HUMAN UNDERSTANDING  
KEEP YOUR HEARTS AND MINDS THROUGH CHRIST JESUS OUR LORD.

There was a best-selling book in 1995 by Daniel Goleman called *Emotional Intelligence*. This book provided us with many examples of the effects that our emotions can have on our rational brain. The book begins with the story of Gary and Mary Jean Chauncey, who were in an Amtrak train that crashed into a river after a barge hit and weakened a railroad bridge in Louisiana. Gary and Mary Jean were trapped in their compartment as they tried desperately to save their 11 year-old wheelchair ridden daughter Andrea who had cerebral palsy. Finally, they succeeded in pushing Andrea through a window to rescuers. They saved her life, but they did so at the cost of their own. It's a heart-wrenching story, but anyone who is a parent can relate to it and testify that, under similar circumstances, they would have done the same thing. There's nothing you would not do to protect your own child, including give your own life.

And, every once in a while, there comes a story about someone who gives his or her life for a complete stranger. In May 2002, the Hartford Curren carried a story of Robert Bonadies, a sky-diving instructor who gave his life while saving one of his students. Cynthia Hyland was tumbling through the air at more than 120 mph and couldn't get herself into the proper position to open her parachute. Neither could she find her parachute rip cord. Fortunately, she was flanked by two instructors, Bonadies and another instructor, Jim Olko. At first the jump went according to plan. Bonadies and Olko were on either side of Hyland, holding handles on her jumpsuit. They got into the proper position, facing the ground, back arched upward. Hyland practiced touching her rip cord. The three tipped over and went into a dive. That is when Hyland discovered she couldn't find her ripcord. She didn't know how close she was to the ground. Bonadies knew and he knew that further delays would mean a fatal landing. And, so, he stayed with her long enough to pull her ripcord, but too long to pull his own before impact. Hyland told investigators that Bonadies, known to his friends as "*Bobo*," died because he took the time to ensure his student's Hyland's survival. Hyland saw none of this actually happening. She was fortunate enough to float to a soft landing in a field. There she gathered up her parachute and began walking back to the airport. Two residents who live near the farm where Bonadies fell broke the bad news to her. Hyland said, "*I broke down crying knowing what he did to save my life.*" No wonder she cried. Someone sacrificed his life to save hers.

Hear again what Jesus says to us in John 15:13. Jesus says, "*No one has greater love than this, to lay down one's life for one's friends*" This is the ultimate display of human affection and character - to sacrifice one's life for someone else. I wonder if we ever really take the time to reflect the emotions Jesus must have had as he hung upon the cross ...when he submitted his will to the will of his Father and gave his life for us. Did he experience the "*indescribable aloneness*" or "*terror*"? If so, then no wonder he cried out, "*Eli, Eli, lema sabachthani?*" which means "*My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?*" (Matthew 27:46). And, to think, it was all in our behalf. Jesus said, "*No one has greater love than this, to lay down one's life for one's friends*" Jesus lay down his life for us. What a mission of love that is! It's love that has inspired millions for over 2,000 years.

**Please note, however, that laying down your life for a friend or even a stranger is different from laying down your life for a sheep.** Read again with me Jesus' word from the 1<sup>st</sup> verse of today's Gospel reading: *"I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep."* Now, I hope some of you don't mind being called a dumb and dirty sheep, because this is who Christ died for - you and me. Actually, it is the sheep who should be insulted. After all, a sheep never sinned against his neighbor, or passed on the latest juicy gossip. A sheep never deliberately abused its body with drugs or stole from its employer. Judged by their own standards, sheep are pretty upright creatures. Notwithstanding, sheep are not the smartest animals alive. In fact, someone one said, *"God created sheep in order to make chickens look smart."* In any event, I think Jesus' use of the word *"sheep"* is an accurate metaphor – because we are all like sheep, we have all gone astray and those sheep includes all the sheep – family members and non-family members, friend or foe, those familiar to us or those who are strangers, the dumb and the smart alike. Jesus not only laid down his life for a friend or a stranger, he laid his life for all of us – no matter who we are of what we have done.

Recently, there was a story on the internet about a man named Danny Simpson who in 1990 lived in Ottawa, Canada. Danny was desperately short on cash. He saw no way out except to take a pistol that had been handed down in his family to rob a bank. His ill-fated heist netted \$6,000. Danny was promptly arrested. At his trial, 2 significant things happened. 1<sup>st</sup>, Danny was sentenced to 6 years in prison. But, 2<sup>nd</sup>, as the courtroom looked closely at the evidence, spectators began to take a close look at the gun he had used in the robbery. It was a .45 Colt semi-automatic, an antique made by the Ross Rifle Company in 1918. Its value? About \$100,000. Did you catch that? Danny robbed a bank for \$6,000, all the time holding, potentially, a \$100,000 gun in his hand! You really have to ask, are people really smarter than sheep? Again, friend, stranger, dumb, or smart, Christ laid down his life for all. With that being said, we really have to take a look why Christ had to die for us all – no matter what shape or form we come in. We all have the age-old problem that has a way of contaminating our lives each and every day. It is called sin. We have all fallen short of the glory of God. But, here's the thing, God loves us and sees something in each one of us that makes us worth saving.

**And, what a wonderful God our God is. God sees in us something that we do not see in ourselves.** God cares for the dumb, desperate, sometimes evil creatures alike, including the like of you and me. In his first year of ministry, Pr. David Neil Mosser recalls a sticky situation he faced when he was called to perform a funeral for one of his church members. This man had died in prison. Even those closest to him couldn't recall any good qualities in his life. How could Rev. Mosser preach an uplifting funeral meditation on someone whose life had been so horrible? Fortunately, 1 of Mosser's older colleagues gave him some good advice. He said, *"Pastor, if you can't brag on the person ...you can brag on God."* And, so as Pr. Mosser wrote his funeral service for this man, bragging on God. Mosser recalled in his sermon what Jesus did for the thief who died next to him on

the cross and how - in his dying hours - Jesus removed the sins of this career criminal and received him as a child of God. Jesus' words to this man were: "Truly, I tell you, today you will be with me in Paradise." How awesome our God of mercy and grace is! What a wonderful God we worship – a God who has such amazing mercy on the likes of you and me!

What I hope you see is the divine absurdity of it all. The Lord of the universe layed down his life. He layed aside his regal robes to take up the cross of degradation and death. He layed aside his crown of glory for a painful crown of thorns, and he did it for us. Can you get your mind wrapped around such an astounding truth? Are you worthy of such an act? I certainly am not. Are you? But, somehow God found a way to turn dumb sheep into sons and daughters of God. That's why Christ lay down his life. I don't fully understand why it had to be done that way, but the result is staggering all the same.

There was a time when former President Jimmy Carter was working in the Philippines on a house for the Habitat for Humanity. The house was near where the famous Bataan death march of World War II began. It was a very hot day, and as President Carter and the others worked, their bodies were covered in sweat. The homeowner was later asked what meant the most to him about the project. He replied that one day as he watched, he noticed that as President Carter worked with the mortar, some of his sweat fell into the mix. The homeowner expressed his emotions like this: *"I know my walls are blessed with the sweat of President Carter in them."* Sisters and brothers I am telling you this day, sweat dropped from Jesus' body in the Garden of Gethsemane when he committed himself to the assignment which God gave him, but it was drops of blood that sealed the deal on Golgotha.

A recent Gallup poll reported that 98% of Americans believe in God, that 80% believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God, but only 40% think that coming to church to become engaged in worship and to study of Scripture is very important. I find that difficult to believe. People believe that Jesus shed his blood on our behalf. Yet, we say it's not really all that important to come to church to offer thanks to God? Sounds like something a bunch of dumb sheep might say.

Read again that 1<sup>st</sup> verse in our Gospel lesson with me today: Jesus said, *"I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep."* I don't like being classified with sheep. But, I know I'm a sinner, so I guess my 1<sup>st</sup> step in coming to know Jesus is to acknowledge I truly sometimes belong to the pack of sheep. I know I am unworthy of having the Lord of Life sacrifice himself on my behalf. However, if today I am willing to begin inviting him into my life, I now have the opportunity to discover that I should be sacrificing myself for him. Today's not too late to start. By his grace let us begin dedicating the rest of our lives to him today, now and forever more. Amen.

