

Epistle
1 John 3:16-24

¹⁶We know love by this,
that he laid down his life for us—
and we ought to lay down our lives for one another.

¹⁷How 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?

¹⁸ Little children,
let us love, not in word or speech, but in truth and action.

¹⁹And by this we will know
that we are from the truth
and will reassure our hearts before him
²⁰whenever our hearts condemn us;
for God is greater than our hearts,
and he knows everything.

²¹Beloved, if our hearts do not condemn us,
we have boldness before God;

²²and we receive from him whatever we ask,
because we obey his commandments
and do what pleases him.

²³ 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.

²⁴All 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.

Gospel
John 10:11-18

¹¹ 'I am the good shepherd.
The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep.

¹²The 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.

¹³The hired hand runs away
because a hired hand does not care for the sheep.

¹⁴I am the good shepherd.
I know my own and my own know me,
¹⁵just as the Father knows me and I know the Father.
And I lay down my life for the sheep.

¹⁶I 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.

¹⁷For this reason the Father loves me,
because I lay down my life in order to take it up again.

¹⁸No 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.'

Reading the Epistle this Week

This next clip from 1 John makes demands:
walk the walk, not just talk the talk,
with Jesus as the best example

Can you imagine opposing factions,
Who talk a good enlightened spirituality game
But don't have anybody else's back?

'Brother or sister', 'one another', 'little children'
That's 'us' talk, 'fictive kinship', sectarian, specific
Not a universal vague obligation to all humanity

The argument moves in 19-24 to assurance
when our hearts condemn or do not condemn us
we remain known and beloved

The flurry of Fourth Gospel diction commands response:
to believe in the name, and love one another,
and abide in him and he in us

If the first half, 16-18, is 'paraenetic' moral teaching
Is the second half, 19-24, also just moral exhortation
Or making a prior claim or ethical anchor?

Imagine a competing argument,
About knowing enough or doing it right to belong,
But not required to share the world's goods to need?

Reading the Gospel this Week

This John text is one of the 7 'I am', *egō eimi* statements:
bread of life (6:35) light of the world (8:12) door (10:7)
good shepherd (10:11,14) resurrection and life (11:7)
way, truth and life (14:6) true vine (15:7)
each with a definite article 'the' *ó* or *ho*

Try reading 'I am' as alternative to synoptics' 'kingdom is like'
like a parable, *mashal* contrasting this world and Jesus'
or try to defend literary metaphor, or Frye's 'metonym'
like the 7 signs in John, this is high rhetoric,
a distance from Mark's Jesus this year, eh?

Try allegorical reading, 'this means that':
Who are the sheep, wolves, hired hands,
and who are the 'other sheep' – mixed among, or separated
and what would the 'one flock' look like?

Is knowing and being known the key, *ginōskō ginōskousi*
To being loved *agapa*, or giving up life *psyche*?

Is the Father's love for Jesus conditional on his sacrifice?
Is his death commanded, imperative, or elective, chosen?
(is this the dilemma 1 John is trying to resolve?)
Is Jesus a role model – our choice WWJD
Or is his sacrifice vicarious, and our role passive gratitude?

It's 'Good Shepherd Sunday' – with Psalm 23
Can we get beyond childish reassurance?