

“Laying Life Down” a sermon based on John 10:11-18 preached by Kerry Enright at Knox Church Dunedin New Zealand on Sunday 22 April 2018.

It was done for us before we were born, before we were thought of.

It was done for us by people we never knew and is done by people we know.

People laid life down for us.

Our mothers – the disruption of life, the discomforts of pregnancy, disturbed sleep, feeding in the night, responding to us as children, listening for our cries and fears, helping us through our tantrums and our joys, soothing hurts, comforting sorrow. To be clear, I am not wanting to let fathers off the hook!

Our parents – building a home, saving hard earned money, forgoing pleasures, paying for our education, advocating for us when we make mistakes, protecting us when we take risks, defending us against criticism, feeding us, caring for us, staying awake worrying about us, talking about how we can best be helped, comforting us when we are hurt, caring for us when we are sick, offering guidance and encouragement and support for us when we are not sure what to do.

Our partner or friend – adapting to the ways of another, putting aside their own ways and preferences, sacrificing ambitions to be with each other, heartening us when we get discouraged, supporting us when we struggle.

Colleagues who adapt to a new way of doing things when we arrive.

Mentors that make sacrifices just to be with us, to support us and accompany us.

And more.

Our life is what it is because others laid down their lives for us, sacrificially and lovingly.

Our life becomes gratitude for lives laid down.

Among them are those who served during war.

By coincidence, yesterday I met at the Farmers’ Market a teacher from Vonunu on the island of Vella Lavella in the Solomon Islands, where my father spent some of World War Two.

I visited there – dense forest, intense humidity, mosquitos that were way too friendly, rugged hills, plenty of places for fear to flourish.

For many in many wars, conditions were much worse. Many laid life down for peace in a different way. This way of being, of laying life down, is central to human flourishing.

It runs counter to a calculated existence, of acting in response to reward, of functioning contractually, of living transactionally, of doing this in expectation of that.

Laying life down is a different economy - love of other for their sake, not expecting pay-back.

Wendell Berry is an American poet.

He tells the story of his family who grew tobacco and lived on the edge of hunger.

In the winter of 1907, his grandfather harvested the crop and travelled to Louisville to auction it to pay off debts.

He returned with no money because the American Tobacco company had a monopoly on prices, a company owned by James B. Duke of Duke's University.

That began, said Berry, his family's advocacy for small farmers and land-conserving economies.

Berry said – "The Duke Trust exerted an oppression that was purely economic, involving a mechanical indifference, the indifference of a grinder to what it grinds."

To make sense of this history, Berry borrows the language of "boomers" and "stickers."

Boomers are motivated by the desire for money, property and power, of making money then leaving while ahead.

Stickers are motivated by affection, by love for a place and its life and its people, sticking around regardless of the reward.

In John's gospel the good shepherd is contrasted with the hired hand.

The shepherd is a sticker; the hired hand is a boomer.

When the going gets tough, the sticker stays and lays down her life for people.

The boomer runs because he does not care for people.

The sticker stays long enough to know people.

The boomer is indifferent to what he grinds.

Naturally, when we hear language of laying life down we think of crucifixion and death.

Jesus stuck with the cause of God to the point of crucifixion.

But we are hearing this reading in the season of Easter.

So perhaps the reading is saying that the resurrection is about God's stickability.

This is no hired hand who lasts until the death of Jesus and no longer.

Here is a shepherd whose love persists, whose laying down continues. The resurrection proclaims God the sticker.

The word used in First John is abide: to dwell among, to stay with, to stick at it.

The resurrection is God's commitment to sticking around, come what may.

I have spoken before of a friend who is a GP in a small town in the North Island.

Until he went there, for many years the community had a succession of short-term appointments, partly because only 15% of medical graduates become GPs, and not many of those become rural GPs.

He has been in the small town for twenty five years, by choice.

He speaks of the bond that develops between a rural doctor and the community, and of how health care becomes the shared responsibility of community and doctor

He tells of a woman with cancer who fell in her bathroom at 3 am and broke a bone and was in pain.

Such is the bond she waited until 9 am on Saturday morning because she did not want to disturb the doctor in the middle of the night or too early on Saturday morning.

The need for rural GPs is growing as many are aging and there is a 20% vacancy rate.

The gospel translates in many ways, including to the training of doctors who will lay life down for the sake of others.

It relates to teaching.

We had good teachers at my secondary school who had been there for many years, who had become part of our small town, who knew us as families and who brought thereby an awareness and awareness, even if they called us by the name of our older brother or sister.

They stayed by choice – they had power to lay life down, and they had power to take it up again.

And for us as a church of the good shepherd?

To lay life down for the neighbourhood to which we have been called since 1860.

To lay life down, not as a boomer for what is in it for us, but as a sticker, as a church which welcomes and sends people as they come and go, with everyone being included.

To be a church of the good shepherd that gets to know people, and to cherish people who do not belong to this fold.

To be a church of the good shepherd where the Christ who stands in our midst empowers us to lay life down.

A risen Christ who abides beyond our years here, beyond our lives, who does not run at the sight of wolves, but lays his life down to protect and keep us.

Laying life down is a gift of Christ to the world.

Thousands come out for Anzac commemorations.

Might the growing numbers be because people sense that here is a way fundamental to our future – the way of laying life down.

We believe this power is at work in our world, and in us, which is why we name that power God, to whom be all praise and honour, glory and power, world without end. Amen.

KNOX CHURCH, DUNEDIN

growing in courage to live the Jesus way



Knox Church
449 George Street
Dunedin
New Zealand
Ph. (03) 477 0229

www.knoxchurch.net

Kerry Enright: 027 467 5542, minister@knoxchurch.net