

LAYING DOWN

John 10:11ff

“Remember the Alamo” goes the famous saying. Do you know why? Do you remember the Alamo – its significance? I’m guessing most people don’t any more.

Well, it’s a famous phrase because brave men like Colonel Barret Travis, Davey Crockett and James Bowie along with 179 others, hugely outnumbered by Mexican forces, stood their ground there and fought off inevitable conquest for 13 days. Eventually they all gave their lives, but not for naught. While they were keeping Santa Anna’s troops busy, the Texas army was amassing and eventually would win Texan independence.

So, the reason the battle is so famous is because of the dedication of the men inside, who simply refused to LAY DOWN and surrender. I’m pretty convinced that no one would “remember the Alamo” if those guys had just all surrendered.

In 1976 another famous story of grit and determination took place in Uganda when hijackers successfully landed a plane in Entebbe Airport and demanded that Israeli leaders give them an exchange of political prisoners for the passengers they were holding hostage. Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin, in a gutsy move, refused to negotiate and instead orchestrated a secret raid on the airport which took the hijackers by surprise and rescued nearly all of the hostages.

Again, I’m pretty sure that the raid would not be remembered if Rabin would have just LAID DOWN, made the trade and not stood his ground.

Laying down. It seems like a sign of weakness, of giving up, of fear. We generally are taught that we should stand up for ourselves and fight for our freedoms – that we are who we are largely because of our willingness to stand up for what’s right. And we are proud of our military men, our leaders, our students when they stand up for principles and defend freedom.

Who LAYS DOWN, when the “going gets tough?” The coward. The weakling. The timid. The quitter. Or, to use a term from my youth: the fraidy cat. And none of us wants to be that. Right? LAYING DOWN.

But today, in our lessons, please note the amount of times we see these words as it relates to our Lord Jesus: 1 John 3:16: “This is how we know what love is: Jesus Christ LAID DOWN his life for us, and we ought to LAY DOWN our lives for our brothers.” John 10:11: I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd LAYS DOWN his life for the sheep.” And four verses later: “I know my sheep and my sheep know me – and I LAY DOWN my life for the sheep.” Verse 17: The reason my Father love me is that I LAY DOWN my life – only to take it up again. No one takes it from me, but I LAY IT DOWN of my own accord. I have authority to LAY IT DOWN and authority to take it up again.”

Lay down, lay down, lay down. Jesus, the One we worship with all our hearts – the one to who is lauded as worthy of all glory, honor and praise far above all authorities and powers, characterizes Himself as One who LAYS DOWN – gives Himself up – succumbs to the enemy by choice. Isaiah describes Him like this: “he was led like a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before her shearers is silent, so he did not open his mouth.”

The long and short of it is that, when it came to our salvation, Jesus seemingly let the Evil One have his way. He LAY DOWN and permitted himself to be mocked, beaten, tortured, and crucified – He grit His teeth and allowed His enemies to get the upper hand, to win the battle, to be on top. But not because He was a victim, a quitter, a fraidy cat. Not because He was out of control. Rather because He chooses God’s plan over man’s ideas, God’s strength over man’s pride. Jesus understood what it took to win our salvation, and so He humbled himself and became obedient, obedient unto death.

And in the end, because of Jesus’ humility and self-sacrifice, God accepted His sacrifice as the price necessary to pay for our failure and atone for our sin. Laying down was the only way to win the victory, the only way to accomplish our salvation -- and so Jesus became the Lamb of God who was led to the slaughter on our behalf.

LAYING DOWN. What about us? Are we ready to be like Jesus and able see the bigger picture when it comes to our pride? Are we ready to let God’s purposes and plans overshadow our opinions and feelings and desires?

The two brothers weren’t. They were so angry with each other due to perceived inequities in the family inheritance that they just couldn’t let go of it. They knew that God called them to forgiveness, but they just couldn’t get past their hurt feelings and inner anger. It

was wrapped inside their belly like a malignant tumor. And so, they wouldn't speak with each other any more – even when they went to church – even when they knelt at the altar!

Dave wasn't ready to lay it down either. His idea at work had been shelved in favor of the idea of his subordinate coworker, Jerry; and Dave felt shunned and disrespected. And so, from then on, he began to give something far less than his best effort at work, and he did everything he could to undermine Jerry's work. In fact he told lies about him, mocked him behind his back, and urged others to disrespect Jerry too. Dave was committed to NOT laying down.

So was Andrea. Andrea got cut off in traffic by some speeding, hot-shot kid. And now she saw him riding on the bumper of some older couple. Oh, how Andrea wanted to give him a taste of his own medicine. Oh, how she wanted to slow him down. Her foot stepped harder on the pedal. Her adrenalin started pumping. Soon she was on his tail shouting at him.

You've been there. I know you have. You hear the Spirit's voice whispering in your ear: "Let go of it. It's really not that important. Don't compromise your integrity. Don't compromise your witness. Don't give in to the ways of the Tempter. Lay down. Give it up." As St. John says in our Epistle Lesson: "Dear children, let us not love with words or tongue but with actions and in truth."

But in the other ear you hear, "But it's not fair. How dare they! I need to stand up for myself. I need to assert my right! I'm not backing down one inch."

Whose voice will you listen to?

Many of us try to find a middle position. In our heads we consider it the voice of good reason that tries to justify giving into our pride. And, building off of that, we create a justifiable case for doing what we know is not of God. "Yes, a lesson must be taught." "Yes, there is no other way to accomplish the task." "Yes, the end justifies the means."

Politicians are good at this. They spew vitriolic venom at rival politicians with the assumption that it's okay to break the eighth commandment because they're seeking greater good –because they're "right" –because that other guy's an idiot.

Church leaders can do it too. Under the banner of “defending truth” they can misrepresent and mischaracterize those who differ theologically as tools of the Tempter. They may even bend the truth themselves to suit their argument.

But then we get back to our text. Lay down. Lay down. Lay down.

Jesus laid down His life. He did it for you and for me. He did it without thought about what He deserved, what His rights were. He did it because His love for His Father and His love for His people was far greater than the voices that appealed to His human pride.

And, brothers and sisters, that same Spirit that enabled our Good Shepherd to lay down His life is also at work among us.

This morning Amanda Wuhrmann and her family have declared that this Savior – the One who LAID DOWN HIS LIFE for us -- is the One whom they want the twins to follow – that they want the Good Shepherd to guide and lead Hazel and Theo into the ways of the Heavenly Father. We’ve joined them in that pledge – committed ourselves to being part of the team to help Amanda and her family raise Hazel and Theo under the Gospel.

If we take that seriously – all of us – from parent to sponsor to grandparent and congregation member -- then that means that we want not only to tell these little ones *about* the Good Shepherd who laid down His life for the sheep; but that we want to show that Good Shepherd in the way we live and speak and act.

In other words, our goal is to show them that God’s will and ways are the most important thing to us. That we are ready, when called by Him, to lay down our pride, our power, our stature so that we can serve Him who first served us.

And what does that mean? A lot. It means we will show them forgiveness. Even in those days when it might seem illogical, irrational, unreasonable -- because the Good Shepherd forgave sinners like us when we were lost in trespasses and sins. But there’s more.

It means we will show them the value of the Word of God. Even when we are busy with other things, we’ll make time for it. Because the Good Shepherd continues to feed us with Good News, and we want to worship Him with our hearts and lives. But there’s more.

We will show them generosity. Even when we have other ways we can use our resources for ourselves. Because we value the strength of the Gospel to change lives and transform people, and we know that we are a part of His plan to accomplish this work. But there's still more.

We will show them hope, joy, peace, patience. We will encourage them to see that the Good Shepherd is there to care for them, day after day – that He loves them and so do we. We'll show it in our kindness, our compassion, our words of encouragement.

The list could go on and on. But let's just say this. We are all children of the Good Shepherd, and, having been blessed by His servant leadership, we want to shepherd along one another. We're part of a team. We're part of a family. And so we LAY IT DOWN for one another.

May God bless us as we take responsibility for one another and as we lay down our lives to serve Him in His kingdom.

In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.