

Willow River Parish: Clear Lake, Deer Park, and Faith Family

Title: Death and Life: The Path to Abundance

Lesson: John 10:11-18

¹¹ "I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep. ¹² The hired hand is not the shepherd and does not own the sheep. So when he sees the wolf coming, he abandons the sheep and runs away. Then the wolf attacks the flock and scatters it. ¹³ The man runs away because he is a hired hand and cares nothing for the sheep.

¹⁴ "I am the good shepherd; I know my sheep and my sheep know me— ¹⁵ just as the Father knows me and I know the Father—and I lay down my life for the sheep. ¹⁶ I have other sheep that are not of this sheep pen. I must bring them also. They too will listen to my voice, and there shall be one flock and one shepherd. ¹⁷ The reason my Father loves me is that I lay down my life—only to take it up again. ¹⁸ 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. This command I received from my Father."

During the season of Easter, we say "Christ is risen," "Christ is risen indeed!"

I read several books to my son almost every day. Recently, I read him a storybook about the life of a cicada, which made me think a lot.

The story goes this way: A cicada lived underground for 6 years, fully growing before emerging into the outside world. However, she soon felt bored and sought out a playmate. She came across a chubby cicada.

Approaching her, she asked, "Hey, what are you doing here?" To which her friend replied, "I'm laying eggs." "Really? Finish laying your eggs and let's play together," said the cicada. Her friend responded, "I wish I could, but once I lay all my eggs, I'll die." Soon after laying her eggs, her friend fell to the ground beneath the tree and died.

The cicada was deeply shocked and saddened by the event. At that moment, a butterfly flew around the cicada. The butterfly asked if she had seen the orange tree. Wiping away tears, the cicada replied, "No. Why?" The butterfly responded, "I need that tree to lay my eggs." Curiously, she asked, "Will you die after laying your eggs too?" "Yes, I will," the butterfly replied. She asked, "If laying eggs means dying, why do you want to lay eggs?" The butterfly

replied, "Laying eggs is like living again." With that, the butterfly flew off to find another tree.

Similarly, she encountered other insect friends. They knew that laying eggs or mating would soon lead to their demise, yet they embraced it with joy and willingly proceeded.

Left alone, the cicada couldn't comprehend their actions and silently pondered, "Why do they lay eggs if it means death?"

At that moment, she saw baby cicadas crawling out from her tree and burrowing into the ground. She asked, "Where are you going?" They said, "Underground. We'll come back up in a few years." Watching them, the cicada realized, "Oh! When I lay eggs, babies like them are born. They'll grow into cicadas like me! That's what laying eggs means—dying to live again!"

And that's how the story ends, with her laying eggs.

Nature is truly marvelous. Nature is astonishing. Every living thing within nature instinctively knows how to live and survive, without schools or formal education.

However, humans seem to be a bit different from other creatures in that we're a bit more complex. Of course, we're still part of nature, so we have instincts too. We eat, sleep, and love. When we have children, taking care of them makes us happy. At night, when we see Evan sleeping peacefully beside us, we think, "Where did this angel come from?" and thank God for him.

However, unlike other creatures, we have the ability to think. So we think about life, its value, how we should live, and what happiness is. We constantly ponder and agonize over these questions.

Friends, how should we live? What makes a life worth living, happy, and good?

Already, Jesus has shown us through His life how we should live and what kind of life is happy. In John 10:11, Jesus says, "I am the good shepherd." The word "good" in Greek is "kalos." This word encompasses meanings such as beautiful, excellent, and fine. What do we consider beautiful? We might

say something grand, splendid, or elegant is beautiful, but here, "beautiful" carries a slightly different meaning.

We consider the hands of a mother, rough and wrinkled from dedicating herself to raising us, beautiful. We consider the hands of a farmer, roughened from toiling in the fields all day to feed us, beautiful. Similarly, we consider the lives of those who open their hearts to others and willingly give their time and lives for them to be beautiful.

Introducing Himself as the good shepherd means that Jesus willingly gives His life and time for us. A good shepherd knows his sheep, and the sheep know him. Knowing the sheep goes beyond just knowing their names, where they live, or what they eat; it means understanding every aspect of their lives—their joys, sorrows, worries, and fears. It means going beyond knowing to healing their wounds and guiding them out of darkness into the path of light. Therefore, knowing enriches life.

The good shepherd is entirely different from the hired hand. The hired hand is not a shepherd, so when the wolf comes, he abandons the sheep and flees. Regardless of what happens to the sheep, the hired hand doesn't care because his focus was money, and he is more important to himself than anything in this world.

The good shepherd cares not only for his own sheep but also for those outside the sheep pen, enriching their lives and guiding them onto the right path. This means that God's love and grace extend not only to the Jews but also to the Gentiles, including the marginalized, the poor, the sick, the elderly, women, and children. Moreover, the sheep who follow the good shepherd trust and follow him.

After Jesus ascended to heaven and the early church was established, there was something remarkable about it. Early church Christians showed astonishing love to the Gentiles. They didn't discriminate based on nationality or race but helped those in need and even risked their lives for them.

Between 165 and 180 AD, a disease called smallpox spread in Rome, causing about 25% of the population to die. Then, between 251 and 266 AD, measles spread, leading to the deaths of around 5 million people. People couldn't do

much to stop these diseases. But early Christians helped those who were sick. They even found joy in caring for them, even if they got sick too. Many were touched by the Christians' kindness and commitment during that time. As a result, lots of people became Christians, and Christianity grew quickly.

In verse 17, Jesus says: “The reason my Father loves me is that I lay down my life—only to take it up again.”

Today, many people think and say that the church is declining, that it's in crisis. However, the real problem isn't just about fewer people going or less money. It's when we don't want to share our love with others, when we don't want to give our time, our things, or even ourselves to help others. That's when the church is really in trouble.

When we lay ourselves down for God's will, life becomes abundant. Living as a Christian means believing in Jesus. And faith and trust are based on love. Love is doing what pleases the object of love. And what pleases Jesus is making life abundant. When we help those around us who are suffering, Jesus rejoices. That's living a life of faith. Therefore, being a Christian, being believers, means living a life of caring for and helping our neighbors, following the life of Jesus.

Let me wrap up today's message with a quote from the preface of "Hymns and Sacred Poems," published in 1739: “The gospel of Christ knows of no religion but social; no holiness but social holiness. "Faith working by love" is the length and breadth and depth and height of Christian perfection. "This commandment have we from Christ, that he who loveth God love his brother also;" and that we manifest our love "by doing good unto all men, especially to them that are of the household of faith." And in truth, whosoever loveth his brethren not in word only, but as Christ loved him, cannot but be "zealous of good works." He feels in his soul a burning, restless desire, of -spending and being spent for them. "My father," will he say, "worketh hitherto, and I work." And at all possible opportunities he is, like his Master, "going about doing good."” Amen.