

Meditation ~ 05/03/09**5-3-09 Acts 4:5-12; I John 3:16-24; John 10:11-18; Psalm 23**

Do any of us here have the ability to lay down our lives for another person or for an ideal or a cause? All of our scripture readings for this morning extol the virtue of being able to do so.

Most of us will not have a dramatic event occur in our lives that would reveal whether we have the capacity to do this or not. We are not the captains of ships that ply the waters around Somalia opening ourselves to attack and capture by pirates.

The story of the Maersk Alabama riveted the attention of many and the actions of her captain reminded us that there is, within some, if not in all of us, the ability to place the lives of others before our own. Captain Richard Philips was fully prepared to lay down his life, to be murdered for the safety of his crew. He realized what it was he chose to do. It was a part of his code of honor and he believed it was his duty. People said they would expect no less of him. That is just the way he is. His act of courage should cause us to stop for a few minutes and wonder if we would be willing and able to act the same way.

He has not been the only person to offer up his life so that others could survive. Most of us remember 9-11 and those who rushed up the stairs as others rushed down. Many know young people who have gone to serve our country in a war far away, in effect offering to lay down their lives for freedom for others. Brave souls are all around us and among us. Often we are surprised by who it is that would step forward and give up his or her life for another in need.

This sacrifice, our scriptures say, is the ultimate proof of our love for one another. It is the proof of the love Jesus had for his immediate followers and for those who would come after. Through the ages many have chosen to give up their lives so that others may find life.

Those who are sensitive to the life and the lives around them are more inclined to consider letting go of their lives for the sake of others than are those who live in the bubble of their own egos. We all have those times when we can only see our own lives as being the most valuable and important. Our vision is narrow and we want what we want. We try to do all we can to preserve our lifestyles without much thought given to other souls. We do this in spite of what our religious system tries to teach us.

When we live in such a limited, self-focused way, we do not have much love for others. Sometimes we talk a good game of love but while words can be pretty and soothing, love is not always revealed through them. It is revealed in actions—in the way we live our lives and give our lives. In the way we are able to flex and bend to meet the needs of others.

Many set aside their lives in service to others without literally losing their lives. Parents set aside plans or even give up their hopes and dreams to support and encourage the hopes and dreams of their children. Those of us who have children want them to have good and fulfilling lives. In guiding our children it is important to remember that

they are people, too, complete with their own dreams and desires. We may not always think that they are following the right paths through life, but we need to remember, that they are not us—their way may be different but it is their way. To impose our desires on them shows a lack of love and understanding. It shows an unwillingness to let our children grow into the adults they are meant to be. I will always remember the wise advice of my oldest daughter when she reminded me, “You know Mom, I know you want me to avoid making mistakes, but I need to make them on my own.”

People in caring relationships learn how to set aside a single minded view of life, remember that their partners do not think in the same way they do, as they work to nurture and develop a love that is important to them. In all successful relationships there is always an element of compromise operating, and element of being able to see things through the other person’s eyes. Give and take is essential if a relationship is to be sustained. There can be no “my way or the highway” attitude that prevails. Instead, desires, goals and drives are set aside to preserve the highest value. Speaking of love is a good thing but revealing love through actions is even better. Sometimes we simply talk things to death. Often a simple, quiet understanding and openness to another is what is needed.

If we allow Jesus to be our guide, our good shepherd and if we hear and heed the message he sought to bring us, we will discover what is of the most value in life. We will know that his message was one of love. A love that sustains us and that helps us turn around and sustain others without imposing ourselves on them. It was a message of generosity of spirit and kindness and patience. It was a message meant to sustain us as we are led beside still waters. It is a message of calm reflection that should restore our souls if we take the time to be still and learn what it is that life and truth are all about.

We may never have a time when we will have to step in front of a bullet meant for another person and prove that we have it within us to literally lay down our lives for another. But, every day, in so many ways, we have opportunities to set aside our narrow goals and consider what the greatest good is for another. Then we have the chance to stop thinking and speaking and begin to act on what we know is the way for us to live and move and have our being. We understand that the love of Christ can shine through us in many different and worthy forms.

-- Amen