

Sacrificial Love – July 10, 2016
By Wayne J. Schneider – Soli Deo Gloria

Sacrificial Love 1 John 3:16-24

In the middle of the 19th century, Alexis de Tocqueville came to America to study her democracy. He found a system of social services maintained by citizen volunteers, whereas in Europe, the government took sole responsibility for the care of people. In the U.S., people believed it was their responsibility to be concerned for their neighbors. Tocqueville was astonished.

Here, we know that the freedom and plenty we experience today comes because of the sacrifice and hard work of those who have come before us. I am blessed because of what my family and Sylvia's family have done for me. Often it is the sacrifice of one person who affects an entire nation.

The year was 1960, Ruby Bridges from New Orleans turned six, and was about to start school. Those were segregation days, and Ruby's father did not want her to attend an all-white school, for fear of the danger it represented. Her mother disagreed. This mother had a terrible life. The day before Ruby's birth, the mother had to carry ninety-pound bags of cotton and wanted a better life for Ruby. Ruby attended that white school and graduated despite the abuse, and became a travel agent. She enjoyed a better life than her parents, but in the process, she helped open the door to blacks across our nation. (note www.rubybridges.com).

St. John and the Holy Scriptures place the power of sacrificial love at the center of our faith. It is the nature of God and Jesus who entered our world, to make this love real for us. Jesus' love calls for a response from you and me, and as the Gospel writer states it in verse 16: "*We know love by this, that he laid down his life for us—and we ought also to lay down our lives for one another.*"

When we respond to Jesus' love with anything less than this, our love is empty and powerless. Jesus' love, sacrificial love, always puts others first. Giving up ourselves for others can be seen in many ways. Martyrdom is the extreme. It was Tertullian who wrote, "The blood of martyrs is the seed of the church." In the seventh chapter of the Book of Acts, we find St. Stephen, who was the first of a long list of martyrs. "Followers of Jesus" have paid dearly for their belief on every continent.

A second way St. John mentions we can give ourselves up to God, is to share our resources. Sacrificial love mandates that we aid our sisters and brothers in need if we can

We can also demonstrate this love by providing service to others. Service comes in many forms and sizes: Praying with those who are suffering; transporting those who need to get to an appointment; taking a meal to a family; inviting a neighbor to dinner; volunteering your time and talent, giving to the church and special needs.

Of course, this is often the opposite of our current culture. As I mentioned last Sunday, we Americans are into me-ism, material-ism, and ingestion. Like everything else, cultural spirituality is all-about-me, not us. The New Testament shows us, however, that the "Fellowship of Believers" is not merely a gathering of religious individuals. The church is a 'community,' a unity, a kinship,' that is joined in sacrificial love. It shares and thrives on Jesus' life-giving love. We call this "The Body of Christ."

The same Tertullian I spoke of earlier, writing around the year 200 AD, speaks of a widely held feeling that outsiders received assistance from the church. He wrote, "**See how they love each other!**" This 2nd-century church was about as diverse as the church of today. But they called themselves, 'brother' and sister,' and they meant it.

Today's American society, especial the west coast, is what church sociologists call, "The None-Zone," because of the lack of interest in traditional Spirituality, and low church attendance.

But, our society is also based on a 'winner and loser' philosophy. The Super Bowl and the World Series are the ultimate models. Then, there are the have's and the have-not's, the rich and the poor.

Jesus' does not want the world to be as it is. I believe what Jesus had in mind, was the world more like the 'Special Olympics,' where every person is valued, and no one fails, everyone wins. In the Special Olympics, when a racer fails, the leader and others stop and help that person up. Then, they hold hands and cross the finish line together . . . all winners!

The Body of Christ has a foundation of God's love and the fragrance of Christ Jesus about it. When we live our lives as Jesus did, it is a testimony of our sacred and vital trust. What are you willing to give up? Alleluia. Amen.