

## We Know Love by This

*By Linda Rex*

**April 21, 2024, 4<sup>th</sup> Sunday / Easter**—The other day I was in a supermarket looking for a few items which we had run out of and which I needed for a special family gathering. While I was standing in the dairy section, looking at the items in the refrigerator box, I noticed someone I had seen earlier elsewhere in the store. In fact, I had seen this person four or five times, gathering items and putting them into a grocery sack.

In my mind, I questioned whether or not they intended to pay for the items. Then I realized that this person looked very familiar, a lot like someone I had seen in another locality entirely—on the streetcorner, holding a sign. Was this someone who was homeless who happened to have been given some funds with which to buy some food?

At this moment, I was called away by my shopping companion, and had to leave. But this story came to my mind as I was reading the New Testament passage for today, 1 John 3:16–24. The apostle John was speaking regarding our care for brothers and sisters within the body of Christ, but our expression of the love of God in Christ is meant to cross all barriers, and not be restricted only to those who are believers in Christ.

I find one of the greatest challenges as I write this blog is to live out what I believe to be true. However difficult it may be to write honestly and openly about what I believe to be true (and it can be very difficult at times), it is even more so to live out the ideals I write about. The truth which I have in Jesus Christ and have been given by the Spirit is profoundly wonderful. But as one who is fully redeemed, restored, and accepted by God, and at the same time, broken, wretched, and so far from being what I ought to be, I realize that too often, what I say isn't always backed up by my actions.

The body of Christ, the Church, has a lot to answer for because too often what we have preached about the love of God in Christ has not been backed up by our actions. True, at times people expect unreasonable things of believers—as human beings, we do have limits to what we can do. But at the same time, Jesus said we would be known as his followers, by our love for one another. And the love Jesus was talking about was the same love he showed for every human being when he laid down his life, took up his cross, and died for each of us.

If, as John says in our passage for today, that we know love by the way in which Jesus laid down his life for us, then the truest expression we can give of God's love is to lay down our own life for someone else, especially when they are a fellow follower of Christ. What are some ways in which we can lay down our lives for one another?

Our minds often go to the ultimate sacrifice, which our brothers and sisters in the military or police force do on a regular basis (for which we are so grateful). But there are many other ways in which our everyday lives are full of opportunities to lay down our lives in tangible ways. In our job, we may risk our life daily by caring for sick people or by having to work in a job situation which isn't safe. If we are next in the grocery line, there may be a person behind us who only has one item and looks to be in a hurry. How difficult would it be to lay down our need to be first and allow them to go ahead of us? Or, as we are getting on the interstate, to allow others to merge onto the interstate by slowing down for a moment, rather than competing with them for a position? Attending one more mid-week event or meeting, or inviting a small group over, may absolutely ruin our schedule and disrupt our household—but what if doing this would make a difference in the life of someone who is lonely or struggling?

As you can see, our everyday lives are full of opportunities to express self-giving, sacrificial love. This is especially true within our own households as we interact with our family or within the household of God, with our spiritual family. It is God's Spirit who pours the love of God into our hearts and enables us to love as Jesus loved us. We trust in Jesus and in his love, and by his Spirit love one another, and do so in tangible ways by living sacrificially in a spirit of service and giving. As we live in this way, God's love spreads out from us into the world, enabling others to see and experience God's love in ways that are lifechanging, healing, and restorative.

*Dearest Father, thank you for pouring out your love through your Son Jesus and by your Spirit. Enable us to receive the love that you give, and in receiving your love, offer it to others as freely as you have offered it to us. Lord Jesus, grant us the grace to live in other-centered, self-sacrificing ways as you did and do. Pour your love by your Spirit in and through us to all those around us, in your name, Jesus. Amen.*

*“We know love by this, that He laid down His life for us; and we ought to lay down our lives for the brethren. But whoever has the world's goods, and sees his brother in need and closes his heart against him, how does the love of God abide in him? Little children, let us not love with word or with tongue, but in deed and truth. We will know by this that we are of the truth, and will assure our heart before Him in whatever our heart condemns us; for God is greater than our heart and knows all things. Beloved, if our heart does not condemn us, we have confidence before God; and whatever we ask we receive from Him, because we keep His commandments and do the things that are pleasing in His sight. This is His commandment, that we believe in the name of His Son Jesus Christ, and love one another, just as He commanded us. The one who keeps His commandments abides in Him, and He in him. We know by this that He abides in us, by the Spirit whom He has given us.” 1 John 3:16–24 NASB*

*“Love is known in its othercenteredness; just as Jesus laid down his life for us to free his love within us for others. The indwelling love of God compels one to live sensitively aware of people around us, and not to exclude those in need. My darling children, let's not deceive ourselves by paying lip service to love while we can truly live the dynamic of love in our practical daily doing! In this we know that our beingness is sourced in that which is really true about us; our doing good is not phoney or make-belief; this is who we are in God's sight! So, even if our own hearts would accuse us of not really being true to ourselves, God is greater than our hearts and he has the full picture! His knowledge of us is not compromised. Beloved when we know what God knows to be true about us, then instead of condemning us, our hearts will endorse our innocence and free our conversation before God. Now, instead of begging God, we speak with confident liberty as sons. We also treasure the conclusion of his prophetic purpose [in redeeming our sonship] and fully accommodate ourselves to his desires and pleasure! Knowing the warmth in his eyes inspires poetic freedom in our every expression. And this is the ultimate conclusion of his intention and desire that we would be fully persuaded concerning the name of Jesus Christ who has successfully accomplished his mission as the son of God to rescue mankind's authentic sonship! Our love for one another completes his joy! Everyone who treasures this final conclusion of God's dream, abides unhindered in seamless oneness in him and he in them. His gift of the Spirit is to endorse our awareness of his abiding within us!” 1 John 3:16–24 Mirror Bible*