

A Life Laid Down
(John 15:9-17)

Her name was Sarah. She was only twelve years old, but it seemed to her family that in those twelve years she had experienced more than most people do in a lifetime. Sarah suffers from a rare blood disorder and from time to time must receive transfusions in order to stay alive.

The problem is Sarah not only has a rare blood disorder, but a rare blood type as well. And in the early days of her illness it was difficult to find suitable donors. One day Sarah became very sick and was in urgent need of a transfusion. There was no time for doctors to search for a suitable donor.

The family, of course, had been tested in the early days of Sarah's illness but none were qualifying donors. Then doctors realized that Sarah's youngest brother, Jimmy, had never been tested. Now, at the age of seven years, the doctors decided to test his blood. It seemed like a gift from God when they quickly reported back to the family that Jimmy could be a donor. Although he was not a match, his blood would keep Sarah alive until a suitable donor could be found.

Mom and dad explained to Jimmy that Sarah desperately needed his blood and that she might die if she did not soon receive a transfusion. The doctors asked Jimmy if he would be willing to donate his blood to save his sister's life.

Jimmy was overwhelmed by all the attention he was getting, but it didn't take him too long to say, "Yes." Jimmy

seemed to understand that without his blood, Sarah would die.

The doctors hurriedly prepared for the transfusion. Jimmy was placed on a gurney and wheeled into a hospital room next to his sister. Sarah smiled at Jimmy and thanked him for saving her life. As Jimmy's anxious mind raced, a nurse inserted a needle into his arm. The pain he felt was sharp but brief – kind of like getting a booster shot, Jimmy thought.

As the pain left Jimmy's arm, he asked the doctor, "Is that all there is to it?" The doctor explained to him that was it – a simple poke with a needle. Jimmy gazed thoughtfully up at the ceiling of the hospital room – pondering an important question. He began to feel lightheaded. He then turned to his mother and in a wavering voice asked, "How long will it take before I die?"

Suddenly, the family and doctors realized that Jimmy thought he was literally giving up his life so that his sister could live. He didn't realize that the blood he gave would be replaced. In his innocence, Jimmy believed he was laying down his life for his sister. Please pray with me.

Redeeming God, whom among us is willing to lay down our life for a sister or brother, let alone a stranger. Speak to us this morning through the scripture read and your word proclaimed. Teach us the biblical understanding of what it means

to lay down our lives for the good of the gospel. Through Christ Jesus we pray. Amen.

What kind of love does it take to lay down one's life for another? In your wildest imagination, can you think of someone or something that you would die for? Little Jimmy, in his innocence, had little trouble laying down his life for his sister.

Everyday in Iraq, soldiers put their lives on the line in the name of freedom. Police officers and firefighters do the same as they serve and protect our communities. Secret Service agents are known for their willingness to "take a bullet" for the president. No matter how heroic these people may be, they act instinctively, not consciously – like young Jimmy – to give up their life for another.

The author of the gospel of John reports on a conversation between Jesus and his disciples. He starts out talking about love – God's love.

⁹⁻¹⁰ "I've loved you the way my Father has loved me. Make yourselves at home in my love. If you keep my commands, you'll remain intimately at home in my love. That's what I've done – kept my Father's commands and made myself at home in his love.

Jesus quickly confesses that there is a purpose connected with his teaching. That purpose is to convey the real meaning of love. Jesus continues to teach.

¹¹⁻¹⁵ "I've told you these things for a purpose: that my joy might be your joy. This is my command: Love one another the way I loved

you. This is the very best way to love. Lay down your life for your friends.

The very best way to love is to lay down your life for your friends – to put your life on the line for others. What meaning are we to take away from this text today? Is Jesus really asking us to die for each other as a response to God's infinite love?

The purpose of John's gospel was to provide conclusive proof to the emerging Christian community that Jesus is, in fact, the Son of God and that all who believe in him have eternal life. To understand the meaning this text has for our lives today, it must be read in light of and with the full knowledge of the crucifixion, death, and resurrection of Jesus.

It is our belief that Jesus is the instrument of God's most perfect sacrifice. The essence of John's gospel is embodied in the sixteenth verse of chapter three. That's *John 3:16*. God loves us so much that God is willing to sacrifice God's one and only son so that we might have eternal life. Jesus – God in Christ – consciously laid down his life for us.

This is the ultimate sacrifice – to give one's life for another – to give one's only son for the good of the world. This is the good news of the gospel message. The good news of the gospel is that God in Christ Jesus has already paid the ultimate price for us. This not only saves us from the power of sin, but it also means we don't have to pay that ultimate price.

The good news in our text this morning is Jesus is not asking us to literally die for our friends. Rather Jesus is calling us to lay down our lives in other ways.

In my last appointment I encountered a woman by the name of Darla who was diagnosed with inoperable brain cancer. The cancer lingered for more than eighteen months before she died. During the worst time of her illness, many of Darla's friends stopped coming to see her. It wasn't because they didn't care. You see, people didn't know what to say or do or how to react so they just stopped coming to see her.

Darla did, however, have two other friends, Dave and Janet, who were members of my church. Dave and Janet didn't stop coming. Now it wasn't that they knew what to say, any more than Darla's other friends who stayed away. Dave and Janet just showed up. Their ministry with Darla was a ministry of presence. They put aside their fears and remained in the moment with Darla. Many times they drove hours just to spend a precious evening with their friend. Dave and Janet laid down their lives for Darla.

I know another man, Mike, who had suffered from kidney disease for several years. He depended on daily dialysis to keep him alive. He had been on the list for a kidney transplant for years without success. Then as though it were a miracle Mike found out that his granddaughter was a suitable donor. She was eager to give Mike one of her kidneys.

Ultimately, the transplant didn't take place for other medical reasons. The point here is the intent of Mike's granddaughter. Her willingness underscores what Jesus means when he says, "Love one another the way I loved you. This is the very best way to love. Put your life on the line for your friends."

To lay down your life for another is to make a difference in that person's life. It doesn't have to mean literally giving up your life. It means sharing a part of your life – a part of who you are as a caring and compassionate person.

Sometimes it means just showing up, like Dave and Janet. Other times it means feeding someone who is hungry or providing shelter for a homeless person. Other times laying down your life means bringing a meal to someone who is sick or mowing your neighbor's lawn while he is in the hospital. And sometimes it's just as simple as giving someone a much-needed hug when they are down.

The text for this morning continues beyond Jesus explaining the need for us to lay down our lives for others. Jesus says:

¹⁶"You didn't choose me; I chose you, and put you in the world to bear fruit, fruit that won't spoil. As fruit bearers, whatever you ask the Father in relation to me, he gives you. ¹⁷"But remember the root command: Love one another."

Each one of us – you – have been chosen. You have been hand-picked – selected to be in the world. And your purpose is simple – to make a difference in the lives of others. The passage closes with an important reminder to us all. "Remember the root command: Love one another."

We take away from this text a few basic understandings that give clarity of purpose to our lives in the present moment. First, Christ paid the ultimate price with his life so we don't have to. Second, to lay down our life means simply to make a difference in the lives

of others. Third, we have been chosen – selected to be in the world for just this purpose – to make a difference in the lives of others.

And finally, we draw from this text the basic principle of Christianity. If we obey God's root command to love one another, everything else on earth and in heaven falls conveniently into place. If we are faithful to God's root command we will be deliberate about laying down our lives for our friends each and everyday, just as young Jimmy laid down his life for his sister. This is God's command to you – love one another – no matter what! And to make a difference in the world.