

I want to start this morning with the story of Gary and Mary, who were in an Amtrak train that crashed into a river after a barge hit and weakened a railroad bridge in Louisiana. Gary and Mary were trapped in their compartment as they tried desperately to save their 11-year-old wheelchair ridden daughter Andrea who had cerebral palsy. They succeeded in pushing Andrea through a window to rescuers. **They saved her life, but they died.**

It's a heart-wrenching story, but anyone who is a parent can relate to it and testify that, under similar circumstances, you would have done the same. **There's nothing you would not do to protect your child, including give your own life.** That's understandable. **Every once in a while, however, there comes a story about someone who gives his or her life for a complete stranger, or at least someone they barely know.**

In May 2002, there was a story of Robert Bonadies, a sky-diving instructor who gave his life while saving one of his students. Cynthia Hyland was tumbling through the air at more than 120 mph and couldn't get herself into the proper position to open her parachute. Neither could she find her parachute rip cord. Fortunately, she was surrounded by two instructors, Bonadies and another instructor, Jim Olko. At first the jump went according to plan. Bonadies and Olko were on either side of Hyland, holding handles on her jumpsuit. They got into the proper position, facing the ground, back arched upward. Hyland practiced touching her rip cord.

The three tipped over and went into a dive. That is when Hyland discovered she couldn't find her ripcord. She didn't know how close she was to the ground. Bonadies knew and he knew that further delays would mean a fatal landing. **And so, he stayed with her long enough to pull her ripcord, but too long to pull his own before impact.**

Hyland told investigators that Bonadies, known to his friends as "Bobo," died because he took the time to ensure her survival. Hyland saw none of this actually happening. She was fortunate enough to float to a soft landing in a field. There she gathered up her parachute and began walking back to the airport. Two residents who live near the farm where Bonadies fell broke the bad news to her.

"I broke down crying," she said. No wonder she cried. **Someone sacrificed his life saving hers.** We hear about such events from time to time. **We call such people who give their lives for others—HEROES.**

JESUS SAID, "GREATER LOVE HAS NO ONE THAN THIS: TO LAY DOWN ONE'S LIFE FOR ONE'S FRIENDS" (John 15:13). This is the ultimate display of human affection and character--*to sacrifice one's life for someone else.*

I wonder if Jesus experienced those emotions when he hung on the cross--when he submitted his will to the will of his Father and gave his life for us?

What emotions did THOSE PARENTS EXPERIENCE IN THE TRAIN WHILE SAVING THEIR DAUGHTER, OR WHAT DID THE WOMAN FEEL WHEN SHE WAS SAVED WHILE SKYDIVING? Did Jesus experience the "indescribable aloneness" or the "terror"? If so, then no wonder he cried out, "*Eli, Eli, lema sabachthani?*" which means "*My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?*" **And to think, he did it all for you and for me!**

Today, we heard Jesus say, "Greater love has no one than this: to lay down one's life for one's friends." Jesus lay down his life for us. **What a mission of love that is!** It's love that has inspired millions over the past 2,000 years.

Please note, however, that laying down your life for a friend or even a stranger is different from LAYING DOWN YOUR LIFE FOR A SHEEP. Yet listen to Jesus' words: "*I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep.*"

Do not be MISLED!! What transpired on the cross of Calvary was not a deal between equals. A man laying down his life for dumb and dirty sheep is different than laying down his life for another human being.

I hope you don't mind being called a dumb and dirty sheep, by the way, because that is who Christ died for--you and me. **Actually, it is the sheep who should be insulted.** After all, a sheep never killed his neighbor, or passed on

the latest juicy gossip. A sheep never deliberately abused its body with drugs or stole from its employer. Judged by their own standards, sheep are pretty upright creatures. Still, I don't think any of us would lay down his life for a flock of intellectually challenged sheep. As someone has said, ***“God created sheep in order to make chickens look smart.”***

Ian Simmons in his book *Exploding Pigs* tells about a group of Chinese shepherds in Mongolia who were put in a difficult place when their herd of sheep took it into their heads to commit mass suicide in a lake. Two goats with an apparent death wish took the lead, jumping into the 5 ft. deep water, prompting the sheep to follow. Twenty herdsmen took part in a three-hour rescue which succeeded in saving 281 sheep, while another 249 animals, including 206 goats, drowned. Some of the rescued animals had to be restrained from jumping back into the water.

Remember your mother saying to you something like, ***“Well, if all your friends jumped off a bridge, would you do it too?” Well these sheep did.*** Just because some extremely stupid goats jumped into the river, these dumb sheep followed right along.

I love the way Max Lucado describes sheep in his book, *Traveling Light*. He writes, ***“Sheep are dumb! Have you ever met a sheep trainer? Ever seen sheep tricks? Know anyone who has taught his sheep to roll over? . . . No. Sheep are just too dumb.”*** Who wants to give his life to rescue a dumb sheep? Of course, we have to admit that **people sometimes do things that are equally as dumb as A SHEEP.**

Andy Cook in a sermon on the Internet tells about a young man named Danny Simpson who in 1990 lived in Ottawa, Canada. Danny was desperately short on cash. He saw no way out except to take a pistol that had been handed down in his family to rob a bank. His ill-fated heist netted \$6,000. Danny was promptly arrested. **At his trial, two significant things happened.** First, Danny was sentenced to six years in prison. But second, as the courtroom looked closely at the evidence, spectators began to take a closer look at the gun he had used in the robbery. It was a .45 Colt semi-automatic, an antique made by the Ross Rifle Company in 1918. And it's value? About \$100,000. ***Did you catch that? Danny robbed a bank for \$6,000, all the time holding, potentially, a \$100,000 gun in his hand!***

Human beings sometimes do things that are not TOO BRIGHT. Of course, we can sympathize when humans do dumb things out of desperation.

But what about people who do things that are DOWNRIGHT EVIL?

I was reading about the island nation of Guam. Guam has a problem--a big problem. It is infested with snakes--between six and twelve thousand of them per square mile! And these slithering reptiles (often 8 feet long or longer) have wiped out 70% of Guam's native species of birds. The problem, however, is man-made. Guam once had no snakes, but during World War II the brown tree snake was accidentally imported from Australia, New Guinea, and The Solomon Islands as a stowaway in military shipments. **Guam now has no way to get rid of the snakes. They have no natural enemy on the island.**

The Bible teaches us that we as human beings have always carried a snake problem. *Everything we touch we infect.* We discovered a way to harness the wonderful energy of the atom and began building bombs. We invent the internal combustion engine and pollute the air. We discover a way to extract from nature cures for various ailments and we end up producing addictive drugs. ***YES, RIGHT NOW IT IS “PLASTIC.” DUE TO THE CONVIENCE OF PLASTIC WE ARE DESTROYING THE EARTH AND MANY OF HER ANIMALS...THEY ARE SUFFERING A SLOW DEATH DUE TO OUR HUMAN “EVIL.”*** The Lord of Life gave his life for creatures who do such things--creatures such as you and me. Why in the world did He do it? I don't know.

Evidently God sees in us something that we do not see in ourselves.

WHAT A WONDERFUL GOD...TO CARE FOR DUMB-DESPERATE and SOMETIMES EVIL CREATURES LIKE YOU AND ME.

In his first year of ministry, Pastor David Neil Mosser recalls a sticky situation he faced when he was called to perform a funeral for one of his church members. **This man had died in prison.** Even those closest to him couldn't recall any good qualities in his life. How could Rev. Mosser preach an uplifting funeral meditation on someone whose life had been so horrible? Fortunately, one of Mosser's older colleagues gave him some good advice.

He said, ***“Son, if you can’t brag on a person . . . then brag on God.”*** In writing for other pastors, Mosser adds, “Imagine that you are performing the funeral for the thief who died on the cross next to Jesus. He must have been a career criminal, because crucifixion--the most humiliating form of execution--was only reserved for the worst offenders. Only in his dying hours did he repent and turn to God. And yet, in that very moment of repentance, God removed that man’s sin and received him as a beloved child. ***What an awesome God of mercy and grace!*** Maybe we can’t brag on this man’s life, but we sure can brag on God.” **What a wonderful God we worship--to have mercy on such as you and me!**

SOMEHOW GOD FOUND A WAY TO TURN “DUMB SHEEP” INTO SONS AND DAUGHTERS OF GOD.
That’s why Christ lay down his life. I don’t fully understand why it had to be done that way, but the result is staggering all the same.

There was a time when former President Jimmy Carter was working in the Philippines on a house for Habitat. **The house was near where the famous Bataan death march of World War II began.** It was a very hot day, and as President Carter and the others worked, their bodies were covered in sweat. The homeowner was later asked what meant the most to him about the project. He replied that one day as he watched, he noticed that as President Carter worked with the mortar, some of his sweat fell into the mix.

The homeowner expressed his emotions like this: ***“I know my walls are blessed with the sweat of President Carter in them.”***

You know, Sweat dropped from Jesus’ body in the Garden of Gethsemane when he committed himself to the assignment which God gave him, ***but it was drops of blood that sealed the deal “FOR YOU AND ME” on Golgotha.***

A Gallup poll once reported that ***98% of Americans believe in God. That is incredible. 80% percent believed that Jesus Christ is the Son of God.*** But in that same poll, only ***40% thought that religion was very important.*** **I find that difficult to believe.** People believe that Jesus shed his blood on our behalf, and then we say it’s not really all that important? **SOUNDS LIKE SOMETHING A DUMB SHEEP WOULD SAY!**

Jesus said, *“I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for his sheep.”*

I don’t like being classified with sheep. ***But I know I’m a SINNER.***

I know I am unworthy of having the Lord of Life sacrifice himself on my behalf.

INSTEAD, I should be sacrificing myself for him.

THEREFORE, I will continue to dedicate the rest of my life to him.

I hope you will join me and do the same!!! Amen.