

4.19.2026 Easter 2 (John 10:11-16)

We've certainly all heard the story of an American fighter jet that was shot down and crashed inside Iran on April 2nd. As you know, the two crew members safely ejected and the pilot, considering the circumstances, was rescued relatively quickly, about seven hours after the crash, but the other crew member was not brought to safety right away. After ejecting from the plane, this second crew member sent a message over his radio that said, "God is good," and then, though he was injured, he hiked up and along a 7,000 foot mountain ridge, hid in a crevice, and remained hidden behind enemy lines until he was rescued nearly 48 hours later.

One aspect of this story that's interesting to consider is the vast difference between what you may have heard a foreign government was willing to pay to capture this airman, and the amount the US government spent to keep him free. When the crash was reported, and it was discovered by both sides that this American was trapped inside enemy territory, their leaders put a bounty on his head of \$60,000, a substantial amount, but in an effort to save one of our own, hundreds of American soldiers risked their lives in what was described as one of the most complex search and rescue efforts for the US Air Force in enemy territory in decades, and because several aircraft were destroyed during this operation, it's estimated that the United States spent somewhere between \$300-500 million dollars to bring this soldier home.

How much is a person worth? A story like this, which tells of the vast difference between what a foreign government was willing to pay to capture this airman, and the amount the US government spent to bring him home, may lead us to believe that the value of a life is entirely subjective, that human worth simply boils down to the price a person, a group of people, or a nation is willing to pay, but the Bible tells a different story. In fact, Holy Scripture begins by speaking about the creation of humanity in such a way that we can be certain the dignity and worth of every person, from the womb to the tomb, is defined by God and God alone.

The book of Genesis tells us that "*God created mankind in His own image, in the image of God He created them; male and female...*" (Genesis 1:27), and being *created by God in His own image* not only sets us apart from the rest of

creation in ways we cannot begin to imagine, but also, the eternal truth that you were made by God and bear His image is certain proof that the question of your worth can only be answered by Him. Your value as a human being cannot be defined by any created thing, but only by the One who created all things. This truth is established in the first chapter of the Bible, and as Divine Revelation continues to unfold in the pages of Holy Scripture we quickly realize that the value of every human life is a central theme clearly communicated throughout both the Old and New Testament.

Consider the Old Testament, Mosaic Law. The familiar commandment: “*Thou shalt do no murder*” (Exodus 20:13), and the fact that the shedding of innocent blood is repeatedly condemned, is a clear indication of the value and sanctity of every human life. The Mosaic Law also contains other provisions that honor and protect life, such as the laws regarding personal injury and restitution, and the Old Testament principle that required punishment to match the injury - “*eye for eye, tooth for tooth,*” even “*life for life*” (Exodus 21:23-24).

The Psalms found in the Old Testament also provide us with evidence regarding the value of human life, but unlike the Mosaic Law which communicates human worth through commands and instruction, the Psalms connect and anchor our worth to God’s intimate knowledge of every human being and the personal way He cares for each one of us. For example, in Psalm 8, David contemplates the heavens, what he calls the work of God’s fingers, the moon and the stars that God set in place, and then asks, “*What is mankind that you are mindful of them, human beings that you care for them?*” (8:4). You see, David reflected on the magnificence and complexity of the heaven and earth, and then rejoiced in the truth that even in a universe so incredibly vast, God knows us intimately and cares for us personally.

The 23rd Psalm provides us with another example, a beautiful image of our value through the way our Lord, the Good Shepherd, so personally guards us, guides us, provides for us, and leads us on every step of this earthly life, all to the end that we may dwell with Him in the house of the Lord forever, and listen to how Psalm 139 communicates human worth by describing the way God intimately creates and sustains human life. The psalmist writes, “*For you formed my inmost being; You knit me together in my mother’s womb. I*

praise You, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made; marvelous are Your works, and I know this very well. My frame was not hidden from You when I was made in secret, when I was woven together in the depths of the earth. Your eyes saw my unformed body; all my days were written in Your book and ordained for me before one of them came to be" (139:13-16).

In the book of Genesis, in the Psalms, in the Law, and throughout the Old Testament we recognize the value of human life is defined by the Creator of human life - the One, True God who intimately creates and then actively and personally sustains all who bear His image, and this Divine truth that's seen so clearly in the Old Testament, is in the New Testament, raised to a level that our hearts and minds can only begin to fathom because of the precious death and sacrifice of God, in the Person of Jesus Christ. It is in His sacrifice for the sins of the world that we see the ultimate expression of our worth, the true, objective value of human life, and this sacrifice is the focus of our Gospel passage today.

In the text we read this morning, Jesus said, *"I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep. He who is a hired hand and not a shepherd, who does not own the sheep, sees the wolf coming and leaves the sheep and flees, and the wolf snatches them and scatters them. He flees because he is a hired hand and cares nothing for the sheep. I am the good shepherd. I know my own and my own know me, just as the Father knows me and I know the Father; and I lay down my life for the sheep"* (John 10:11-15).

Today, the words of this Gospel passage bring to mind the story with which we began, because in this text Jesus emphasizes the difference between the *hired hand* who *cares nothing for the sheep*, and the *good shepherd* who *lays down His life* for them. Like a hired hand who *cares nothing for the sheep*, a foreign government made a cold-hearted, self-serving calculation about the value of one human life, and concluded that they were willing to pay a \$60,000 bounty to accomplish the goal of capturing this airman, but our nation, and the men and women who risked their lives to rescue one of their own made no such calculation. They didn't count the cost. Whether it was \$60,000, \$300 million, or a life laid down, no price was too high to bring him home.

As this airman recovers from his injuries, I can't help but wonder how often he's thought about the tremendous cost of his rescue, and the people who risked their lives to bring him home. This man must feel so valued and grateful, but the thankfulness he feels is nothing in comparison to how you and I should feel every day, because the message proclaimed by the Gospel of Jesus Christ is not that human beings have set your value at the cost of a \$60,000 bounty or \$300 million dollar operation, but instead that God so values you, that He so loves you that He gave His only Son.

In order to rescue you, Jesus didn't risk His life. No, He gave His life. He came from heaven to earth, you might say He landed behind enemy lines fully aware that He would suffer, bleed, and die to save you. In fact, before He numbered your days, before He knit you together in your mother's womb, before He created you, He knew that He'd die for you, and yet He chose to create you anyway. This is not the work of a hired hand. It's the love of a Savior, the Good Shepherd who laid down His life for His sheep.