

Indeed, rarely will anyone die for a righteous person —though perhaps for a good person someone might actually dare to die.

(Romans 5:7)

No one has greater love than this, to lay down one's life for one's friends.

(John 15:13)

Ask not what your country can do for you. Ask what you can do for your country.

(JFK, 1960 Inaugural Address)

Doubt is a 2008 film about a Catholic church in New York where the new Parish Priest, Father Flynn represents the changes of Vatican II – more open, more friendly and more accessible; a Priest who preaches on the unifying force of doubt. He is contrasted with Sister Aloysius Beauvier, the nun who is principal of the parish school – who represents the stern certainty of traditional religion. I'm going to let you listen to one of their early encounters.

Did you catch it? He asks for sugar and catches her off guard. She tells him that she'd put in the drawer for lent and never remember to take it out. He replies "mustn't have been much to give up then."

Lent is a strange season for me. I like to style myself as part of the Easter people, exalting the doctrine of Grace above all else. I prefer to stand with the apostle Paul when he writes to the Ephesians: For it is by Grace that you have been saved, not of works, so that no one can boast. But then along comes Lent and says to me that before I can get to the Good stuff, I have to get through the hard stuff. Before I get to the Promised Land, I have to go through the wilderness; the road to Easter Sunday passes through Good Friday.

Lent comes along and has the audacity to ask me to *do* something. It dares to ask the question what does your faith look like?

Because talk is cheap. It's easy to say, I'm a Christian because I check a box on a survey every couple of years that says so. It's easy to say almost anything, and part of the challenge is that from the time we were little kids, we've been told that show and tell were equally valid. When we were in elementary school we were given those two options and told that either or is fine. But what if that's wrong?

What if Lent is about moving us from being a tell people to being a show people?

I spent the past two weeks back feeling like I was beating my head against this morning's passage. It's not about giving anything up, it's just this strange aphoristic passage; strange sayings of Jesus. But part of that is the point. Part of picking up the bible and reading these passages that at first blush don't seem to be saying anything of substance is seeing the scripture firstly as a witness to mystery. Mystery is part of our Lenten faith – the obscurity of wandering around the wilderness for forty days with only the promise of a destination to guide

you is what lets us be tested. But it also lets us cut the characters in the Bible a bit of slack. We can tend to be pretty tough on the disciples for not getting what Jesus was telling them throughout his three year ministry, but when we read passages like this one, we're disturbed just enough that we can put ourselves into the story and say "we're not sure we get this either." And for us, if only for a moment, the story becomes more real.

But as we dig a little bit more into the passage, the theme of Lent begins to reveal itself. It becomes a passage about movement, about wandering that might not be so aimless.

Consider two things:

There is the movement from the past to the Present

Yet today, tomorrow, and the next day I must be on my way, because it is impossible for a prophet to be killed outside of Jerusalem.' Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the city that kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to it!

Jerusalem, apparently, has a history. It's the same history Jesus alludes to in the parable of the wicked tenants (Luke 20). In the past, God sent people to declare to the world the scandalous depths of God's love. And in generation after generation, they were ignored, beaten and killed. So God's response is to move from telling to showing. He doesn't send another prophet. He enters reality himself, fully aware of what they will do to him. But talk is cheap. A God who sat back and wrote letters from afar would be a shadow of the God we worship here today. And anyone who has been in love knows this. If all I ever did was tell Beth how much I love her that might be nice, but it wouldn't be enough to build a relationship on. Love always prompts an action. Jesus is God moving from tell to show.

And then there is the movement from the fox to the hen.

He said to them, "Go and tell that fox for me, 'Listen, I am casting out demons and performing cures today and tomorrow, and on the third day I finish my work ... How often have I desired to gather your children together as a hen gathers her brood under her wings, and you were not willing!

My grandmother kept chickens in this little ramshackle coop behind her house for as long as I can remember and I remember once a coyote found its way in. I don't know if there is a big difference between a fox in the henhouse and a coyote, but the coyote made a mess of the places. He didn't fill his stomach with chicken and move on. He killed a half dozen of the birds and left the coop in a bloody mess. This is why Jesus' statement here is so powerful. It's not enough to sanitize it and make it into some theological nicety about a mothering God. It is a statement of reality. There is a fox in the henhouse, and that doesn't bode well for the chickens. **Unless...** unless one hen is willing to let itself become the meal; unless one hen is willing to give up her life for the rest of the coop. Unless one hen is willing to show the rest of

us what love really looks like. The fox in the henhouse is about moving from a tell kind of love to a show kind of love.

Jesus message for us is clear: The Christ follower is called to be a show people, not just a tell people.

And so that leaves us with two questions: How do we show our love to God, and how do we show our love for each other?

There are five ways to show our love for God:

Our Gifts – do we give (whether time, talent or treasure) generously – sacrificially – or do we give what we feel is safe?

Time – do we make time for God or is he an afterthought?

Words – do we commune with God through prayer or scripture reading at any time other than Sunday?

Service – do we do the things God wants us to do, or do we do the things we want to do?

Intimacy – are we trying to make become more Godly?

Not all of these come naturally to all of us, but that's why the challenge of Jesus is bold: love the Lord your God with all of your heart soul mind and strength. It should challenge us to ask am I doing all of that?

But the other side is harder. Love others as you love yourself. My mother in law is a phenomenal gift giver. She prides herself on finding the absolutely perfect gift for any instance, and that's how she is wired to communicate love; I respond to encouragement and Beth responds to intimacy – so even in a family this is tough. All of us have our preferences and our strengths when it comes to the ways we want to give and receive love. But usually, the way we give love is the way we want to receive it, and so the challenge of loving other people is about understanding first how they are wired to receive love and then responding to them that way.

We don't all respond the same way to encouraging words, and we don't all equally value quality time. But we are all called to show love, whatever that looks like.

Jermaine Washington, 26, did something that amazes many people. He became a kidney donor, giving a vital organ to a woman he describes as "just a friend." Washington met Michelle Stevens, 23, when they began working together at the Washington, D.C., Department of Employment Services. They used to have lunch with one another and chitchat during breaks. "He was somebody I could talk to," says Stevens. "One day, I cried on his shoulder. I had been on the kidney donor waiting list for 11 months, and I had lost all hope."

She told Washington how depressing it was to spend three days a week, three hours a day, on a kidney dialysis machine. She suffered chronic fatigue and blackouts and was plagued by joint pain. He could already see that she had lost her smile. "I saw my friend dying before my eyes," Washington recalls. "What was I supposed to do? Sit back and watch her die?"

Steven's mother, suffering from hypertension, was ineligible to donate a kidney. Her two brothers were reluctant. "I understood," says Stevens. "They said they loved me very much, but they were just too afraid."

The operation at Washington Hospital Center in April 1991 began with a painful procedure in which doctors inserted a catheter into an artery in Washington's groin. They then injected dye through the catheter into his kidney before taking X rays to determine if it was fit for transplant. A week later, an incision nearly 15 inches long was made from his navel to the middle of his back. After surgery he remained hospitalized for five days.

Today, both Stevens and Washington are fully recovered. "I jog at least twice a week," Washington says. Three times a month, they get together for what they call a "gratitude lunch." Despite occasional pressure by friends, a romantic relationship is not what they want. "We are thankful for the beautiful friendship that we have," Stevens says. "We don't want to mess up a good thing."

To this day, people wonder why Washington did it -- and even question his sanity. But when one admirer asked him where he had found the courage to give away a kidney, his answer quelled the skeptics. "I prayed for it," Washington replied. "I asked God for guidance and that's what I got."

What did you give up for Lent?