

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen.

Richard Antrim was born just up the road in Peru, Indiana, in 1908, and when he died in 1969, he was a retired United States Navy Rear Admiral. He was also a true “Hoosier hero,” having received our nation’s highest award for military valor, the Medal of Honor, in 1947.

A United States Naval Academy graduate, Dick Antrim served as Executive Officer on the USS Pope during World War II. When that destroyer was sunk in a prolonged battle with Japanese naval forces, Antrim and other survivors ended up in a brutal Japanese prison camp in what was then the Netherlands East Indies.

And it was in that prison camp that Antrim served “above and beyond the call of duty,” saving the life of a fellow prisoner of war. That officer was receiving a vicious clubbing by a frenzied Japanese guard when Commander Antrim stepped forward and indicated he would take the remainder of the punishment.

At the Medal of Honor presentation, President Harry Truman concluded the citation saying, “By his fearless leadership and valiant concern for the welfare of another, [Richard Antrim] not only saved the life of a fellow officer and stunned the Japanese into sparing his own life, and he also brought about a new respect for

American officers and men, and a great improvement in the camp living conditions.”

In acting as he did, Richard Antrim joined a long list of people who have given of themselves to save others. While the circumstances in every case are different, the one thing almost all of these heroes have in common is that their service was not a planned event. They gave of themselves doing the best they could in an unexpected crisis moment.

The unplanned-ness of these sacrifices is part of what makes Jesus’ sacrifice on the cross stand out. We’ve heard the story of the Crucifixion and Resurrection, our central story as Christians, for as long as we can remember.

But if we take the time to really think about it, we might shake our heads and simply be in awe at the sheer courage, love, and strength that led Jesus to walk toward his death on the cross starting many weeks ahead.

We don’t know exactly how long before his death Jesus spoke the words found in John 10, but it was some time before his arrest and eventual crucifixion.

In John 10, Jesus compares himself to a shepherd. A true shepherd, a person whose responsibility it is to protect the sheep, will be willing to do anything to keep those sheep safe. A real shepherd has a calling. This is not just a job;

a real shepherd is not simply a hired hand who is receiving payment to complete a task. This is his life's work, and he will do whatever's necessary to accomplish it well.

Jesus explains clearly how an employee would respond to danger. Jesus says that the moment that danger appears on the horizon – as soon as a wolf threatens the flock – the hired servant will run away. And why does he run away? We might be tempted to say that it is only good common sense. He is trying to protect himself.

And that's the point Jesus is making. A good shepherd is a person who cares for his sheep even at risk to his own life. The good shepherd will stay and face the danger. You can't buy that kind of loyalty. It must come from somewhere within the person.

But Jesus is like a good shepherd who takes this responsibility to heart. He knows his sheep, and he wants the best for them. A good shepherd will even lay down his life for his sheep.

This kind of dedication and selfless love can be challenging to understand. Each one of us might hope we would have the courage and fortitude to respond to a crisis with this kind of dedication, but we might also wonder, in our heart of hearts, if we really would answer the call with such sacrificial love.

So what about us? We don't usually find ourselves in such extreme circumstances. In fact, we hope and pray that we will never be put into a situation where we might be called on to literally give up our life so that someone else might live.

When we hear of someone who does that, we might ask ourselves, What would we do? How would we respond? We can be humbled by the depth of Jesus' love for us. We can listen to the story of Richard Antrim and be amazed that someone was that brave on short notice.

But besides being humbled and amazed and awed, what are we to do? Jesus' words can inspire us to live a life that reflects God's love and compassion. We can approach God in prayer with a spirit of thanksgiving. We can give thanks each and every day that God loves us so much – truly more than we can even imagine.

We can allow that fact to soak into our spirits, and we can repeat that truth every day: "I am a beloved child of God. Jesus loves me so much that he was willing to lay down his life for me."

We can be encouraged by this love. If there are times when we consider ourselves unlovable, unforgivable or unworthy, we can remember that Jesus does not agree. Jesus, the Good Shepherd, looked at the whole flock, which came in every shape and size and color.

He looked at all of those sheep with their individual personalities and faults. And he loved each one of them. We can be encouraged by Jesus' cleansing and forgiving love.

Jesus sees more in us than we see in ourselves. Jesus was willing to give his life so we could live. We can express our thanks and gratitude by trying to live lives that reflect that love and compassion.

Filled with his overwhelming love for us, we can endeavor to follow Jesus in big and little ways. We may never be asked to sacrifice ourselves for someone else, but we may be called upon to forgive someone else.

We may be asked to stretch our patience, our understanding and our tolerance for those we might not consider particularly worthy or lovable.

Jesus can inspire us to look at one another with God's eyes and see the people around us as God's beloved children. We can say "yes" to God by endeavoring to follow our Good Shepherd. Amen.

May the peace of God, which passes all understanding, keep our hearts and minds in Christ Jesus forever. Amen.

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