

**Message: “What Must I Do?”**

**It’s hard to know what to say as I stand before you.** On one hand, we have the heart-rending tragedies of Buffalo, NY and Uvalde, TX. On the other hand, we have a scripture about the power of faith to change lives, families and communities for the better. Our hearts and prayers are with the families of those whose loved ones were taken away by the callous, selfish and evil acts of people misled by others and by their own delusions. Together, these two parts of our lives have the power to change lives for the better.

**There’s a lot we could say about the tragedies.** We could talk about the incident at Laguna Woods as well. Pastor John showed us two pictures last week. They were pictures of Lieutenant Aaron Salter, a retired police officer, and Dr. John Cheng, who practiced sports medicine. Both gave their lives to protect others and paid the ultimate price. They embodied Jesus’ love, *“No one has greater love than to give up one’s life for one’s friends”* (John 15:13).

**We give thanks to all who have made this sacrifice as we gather on this Memorial Day weekend.** Most often, we think of those who were, or are, in the armed services. We include emergency responders and others who go into dangerous situations, like the police, fire department and paramedics. COVID has shown us the sacrificial love of doctors, nurses and healthcare professionals, as well as other essential workers. Let us give them our recognition, thanks and praise.

**I think there are heroes living among us, as well.** For all the stories of those who turned away, who couldn’t take the courageous step, there are the uplifting stories of those who did. The role doesn’t come with glory and honor. Usually, we don’t know their names or much about their lives. But our lack of awareness doesn’t take away the meaning or impact they have, particularly on those whose lives are touched.

**I invite you to honor everyone who has sacrificed to care for others.** This includes parents who love and care for children – their own, adopted or foster, people who care for those living in poverty and need, and people who give voice for those who cannot speak for themselves. May God bless each of you and lead you by faith. Thank you.

**There's a Swahili expression: Panap nia, njia hupatikana.**

It means, "Where there is hope, there is a way." There is hope in faith and the courage to act when others are in need.

**People do courageous things every day, all around us.**

But there are those times when something special happens. We know it when we hear about it or see it. It makes an impression on our heart and mind that stays with us, individually and collectively. These extraordinary actions are a blessing. We pass the stories down, from generation to generation, so it can encourage and inspire others. That's how we pass blessings on. But it doesn't answer a key question.

**What does it mean to give your life for another person?** Acts of courage and self-sacrifice are uncommon. I do believe they happen more often than we realize, though. There's a reason why I think this is true. These acts of courage are evidence of a truth John taught us, "*This is how we know love: Jesus laid down his life for us, and we ought to lay down our lives for our brothers and sisters*" (1 John 3:16 CEB).

**What Jesus showed us is this: God's relationship is special.**

By grace, God gives us a gift. It's the gift of knowing right from wrong, generosity from scarcity, love from hate, passion from apathy. God gave us a conscience so when we're called to react and respond, we have the means to do so. For some of us, our conscience is well fed, versed in the goodness of prayer, God's Word and the grace we share when we're gathered with others in faith. We can be with our family, at church or with a group of men and women on sea, land and air, locally or at other places across the world and act with courage and faith.

**Even better, we have an example in Jesus.** Jesus willingly sacrificed his life so we could have a real life. The life Jesus wants each of us to have goes beyond the limits and boundaries of our everyday existence. The life Jesus wants us to have is filled with the presence, power and prompting of God's own Spirit. If we say "yes" to the prompting of the Spirit, responding wholeheartedly and without reservation, seeking to show God's love for another person without thinking about ourselves or our reward, that's what it means to be a follower of Christ. For those watching from the sidelines, we'll be the hero they need.

**That's the kind of heroism Wesley Autrey showed one day in New York City.** “Wesley was standing on a subway platform when he saw a man nearby have a seizure. The man collapsed and fell onto the tracks as a train was coming. ‘I had to make a split decision,’ says Wesley.

**What he did was amazing.** Leaving his two young daughters standing on the platform, Wesley jumped down in front of the train and laid on top of the man, holding him down. The train passed over them, but both men came out of it without injury. When asked later why he risked his life for a stranger, Wesley replied, ‘I did what I felt was right.’”<sup>1</sup>

**Heroes aren't people who help others because they feel distress or because they're uncomfortable with a situation.** That's particularly true when our acts of generosity come with a high cost to ourselves.

**Heroes have heart.**<sup>2</sup> Those who sacrifice themselves for others are strongly motivated by compassion for others. When we feel empathy for others, when our heart is moved, that's when we're more likely to act. And, if the person or persons in need are suffering, heroes are more like to act again, even more deeply. When we serve God and others with generous hearts, reaching out to those in need with compassion, we're following the guidelines God wrote on our heart and mind.

**When we seek glory for ourselves, we aren't a hero.** When we seek glory for others, we're good; we may be a hero. When we seek glory for God, we're a hero. When we seek glory for God and intentionally do it over and over, we become a hero who transcends the physical limits of this world. Lieutenant Salter, Dr. Cheng and Mr. Autrey embody this kind of hero. I'm sure you know and can name others who do as well.

**What do we need to do to be courageous in this way?** Luke offers a clue. Jesus said, “*the Christ will suffer and rise from the dead on the third day, and a change of heart and life for the forgiveness of sins must be preached in my name*” (Luke 24:45-47). Jesus tells us why: Easter happened. Jesus modeled humility, grace and self-sacrifice for us on Calvary. To be his followers, we need to imitate Jesus' way of living each day of our lives, not just on Sunday.

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<sup>1</sup> Josh Elmore, *Why People Make Sacrifices for Others, Greater Good, April 29, 2015*

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid*

**The key words are “a change of heart and life.”** To be the heroes we all need today, you must change. It’s not easy. It means turning your life over to God, wholly and completely. When you do, there’s a freedom that comes into your life. You’re no longer relying on your strength, but on God’s. This gives you the power to do amazing things.

**You can live extraordinary lives.** On Memorial Day, we retell stories of people whose lives inspire and encourage us. Most of us will never be on a battlefield. Most of us will never be called to go into a burning house. Most of us will never be in the line of duty, serving and protecting people from violence and crime. Few of us will serve in a hospital ward. May those who are with children never have to face a person with a weapon. We give thanks for those who do serve and care for others. But God made us all to be extraordinary where we are.

**We all can live lives of quiet courage, faith and generosity.** Some of you are called to do so as you care for children and teenagers. Some of you are called to do so as you care for elderly parents, family members and friends. We’re all called to do so in our relationships, particularly with our partner, our spouse. And we’re all called to help those in need – the poor, orphaned, widowed, stranger and alien.

**Yet we know we can’t do it alone.** We’re good, but not that good. And, when we’re faced with a choice that comes with a high cost, we need an extra boost at the right time. Trust God. Believe in Jesus. Listen to the Holy Spirit. When you do, you’ll be given the strength and courage to act on your faith in any situation.

**Do so and you’ll be the hero we all need today.**

*I invite you to pray with me ...*

*Lord, help me to be the person you want me to be today. Take away the desires that shouldn’t be there and help me be single-minded in my focus and my pursuit of you. Give me the courage to follow you in all situations and circumstances, even when it may place me at risk of harm. May I be transformed by your love so I may serve others with that same love. Help me to give myself to other in faith and hope so they will know your love. We commit ourselves to you in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.*

**Acts 16:16-34 (CEB)**

One day, when we were on the way to the place for prayer, we met a slave woman. She had a spirit that enabled her to predict the future. She made a lot of money for her owners through fortune-telling. She began following Paul and us, shouting, “These people are servants of the Most High God! They are proclaiming a way of salvation to you!” She did this for many days.

This annoyed Paul so much that he finally turned and said to the spirit, “In the name of Jesus Christ, I command you to leave her!” It left her at that very moment.

Her owners realized that their hope for making money was gone. They grabbed Paul and Silas and dragged them before the officials in the city center. When her owners approached the legal authorities, they said, “These people are causing an uproar in our city. They are Jews who promote customs that we Romans can’t accept or practice.” The crowd joined in the attacks against Paul and Silas, so the authorities ordered that they be stripped of their clothes and beaten with a rod. When Paul and Silas had been severely beaten, the authorities threw them into prison and ordered the jailer to secure them with great care. When he received these instructions, he threw them into the innermost cell and secured their feet in stocks.

Around midnight Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns to God, and the other prisoners were listening to them. All at once there was such a violent earthquake that it shook the prison’s foundations. The doors flew open and everyone’s chains came loose. When the jailer awoke and saw the open doors of the prison, he thought the prisoners had escaped, so he drew his sword and was about to kill himself. But Paul shouted loudly, “Don’t harm yourself! We’re all here!”

The jailer called for some lights, rushed in, and fell trembling before Paul and Silas. He led them outside and asked, “Honorable masters, what must I do to be rescued?”

They replied, “Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved—you and your entire household.” They spoke the Lord’s word to him and everyone else in his house. Right then, in the middle of the night, the jailer welcomed them and washed their wounds. He and everyone in his household were immediately baptized. He brought them into his home and gave them a meal. He was overjoyed because he and everyone in his household had come to believe in God.