

WWJD?
1 John 3:16-24
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WWJD? What Would Jesus Do? When I was younger, those four letters, WWJD, were everywhere in the church – that was the question we were taught to ask ourselves every day, every time we faced a difficult decision, every time we couldn't figure out what the right course of action was, we should just ask ourselves, WWJD? What would Jesus do? And then go do it. Whatever Jesus would've done in that situation, that's what you should do, because as we all know, Jesus was perfect: perfectly good, perfectly wise, always made the right choice, always did the right thing, so if you can just figure out what he would've done and then do the same, you'll be perfect too. As followers of Jesus Christ, we are supposed to be like him, grow more and more like him every day, follow his example so that when people see us, they see Jesus working in us, because we're doing what he would do, saying what he would say, loving the way he loved. So if you've ever heard that question, WWJD?, if you've ever asked yourself that question, What would Jesus do?, then this morning's reading from John's letter to the church probably sounded like the exact same thing. Jesus gave up his life for us, so we also ought to give up our lives for our brothers and sisters. What would

Jesus do? Give up his life for us. So we should do the same. Great. End of Sermon, see you next Sunday.

Except that - I don't know about you - but most of the time, I don't feel very much like Jesus. Most of the time, I don't act very much like Jesus. I mean, I try – I do my best, day by day, week by week, to ask myself what would Jesus do and then go do it, but man is it ever hard. I get up every morning, and turn on my kitchen faucet, but every time, I get water, not wine. I try to love my family and friends, to be patient and forgiving, to do unto others as I would have them do unto me, but every day it just feels like there are roadblocks and obstacles all around me, just trying to trip me up into doing something dumb or saying something foolish. And then I look at the world all around me, with all these problems that seem so complicated and so heartbreaking and so impossible to solve, and I just feel helpless. Maybe Jesus can fix all this brokenness out there, but what am I supposed to do about poverty? About climate change? About housing prices and addiction and wars in Gaza and Ukraine? I look at the world, and I ask myself, what would Jesus do about all of this, and I feel like I honestly can't rule out him sending another flood, wiping us all out again, start over with something new, make the giraffes sentient this time, see if they manage better. They can't do much worse. And yet there's saintly old John, telling the church, lay

down your life for your brothers and sisters, and you just want to grab him and ask him, what do you want me to do, John?! I'm trying my best, and everything's terrible, and I'm just exhausted. How am I supposed to be like Jesus when Jesus is Jesus and I'm just me? How am I supposed to give up my life when it feels like I've already given up everything, and there's nothing left to give?

Now maybe this is just me. Maybe all of you are managing just fine. If so, that's great, good for you, End of Sermon, see you next Sunday. But if you feel this way, if you've ever felt this way, or if you know someone who feels this way, I think it's worth reading a little further in this letter from saintly old John. Because I don't think his point here is to badger people into feeling bad about themselves, telling them to be like Jesus so they despair when they inevitably fail. Yes, we are meant to be like Jesus. John has already made it very clear in this letter that we are supposed to be like Jesus – God is light, and we should walk in that light, God is our heavenly Father, and we are God's adopted, beloved children, and we should grow up into the family resemblance and look like God, look more and more like Jesus. But John has also made it very clear that the one doing the work to make us look more like Jesus isn't us. The family resemblance that grows in us doesn't happen because of us, it happens because of Jesus. The light that we walk in doesn't shine on us because of us, it shines on us because of Jesus. And so

when we hear John tell us that Jesus gave up his life for us, and therefore we should also give up our lives for our brothers and sisters, his point isn't that we're supposed to watch what Jesus did, and then try really hard to copy him, because that's impossible – we can't do what Jesus did, we can't lay down our lives in the same way Jesus laid down his. The point is that Jesus laid down his life for us – Jesus gave his life for us, Jesus gave his life to us. At the end of this passage, John tells us that Jesus lives in us, because the Spirit he gave us lives in us – the life that Jesus laid down for us is the life that we now have. We have Jesus living in us because of his death and resurrection, because of his Holy Spirit at work in us. And that means that when John tells us to give up our lives for our brothers and sisters, the life we're supposed to give is the life Jesus gave to us. It's not about making our lives as strong and as good and as perfect as Jesus's life, it's about taking the life that Jesus already gave to us and passing it on, sharing it, spreading it to the world around us. Following Jesus doesn't mean pouring our own lives out, struggling and suffering and enduring all this pain and misery trying to make everyone around us happy. The life of a Christian isn't supposed to be a joyless death march, slogging your way through a checklist of good deeds and sacrifices, giving and giving and giving until you have nothing left to give. The life of a Christian starts with receiving, receiving abundant life from Jesus Christ, receiving

the life that Jesus laid down for us, and that's the life we are called to pass on, to share, to give to our brothers and sisters so they can experience the life we've been given from Jesus Christ. Before we can ask WWJD, What Would Jesus Do?, we first have to understand WHJD, What Has Jesus Done? – what has Jesus already done for me, what abundance of blessings and life and love has Jesus already given to me, because that's the abundance that I have been called to share with the world around me. As followers of Jesus Christ, we don't give away ourselves, we give away Jesus, we give the same life that Jesus gave to us, because our lives are finite and flimsy, they run low, they run out, but the life of Jesus Christ is resurrection life - inexhaustible, unending, everlasting, and that's the life we've been given, and that's the life we're called to share.

And that means that if you are feeling exhausted, if you are feeling hopeless, if you feel like you've been giving and giving and giving and it just isn't getting you anywhere, the world is still in trouble, your life is still a mess, the answer isn't to just keep working, keep giving, keep sacrificing. Jesus doesn't want us to be slaves, spending all our energy and life trying to live up to his standards, trying to do what only he can do. He wants us to be his children, he wants us to be blessed, he wants our lives to be full of good things, for us to find rest and strength and abundant, unending life in the life we receive from him.

That doesn't mean that we won't face challenges – there will still be trouble in our lives, there will be pain and suffering and struggle – but our job isn't to fix all the problems we encounter, to act as if we're Jesus and we can save the world from all the problems we see all around. Jesus has promised us that whatever problems we face, whatever trials we are called to endure, he will give us what we need to survive, to endure. John tells the church that they should come to God with bold confidence, and we will receive from him whatever we ask. Just as we received life from Jesus when he laid down his life for us, so we can ask God for whatever we need, and know he will supply our needs, know that he will give us what we are asking for. And whatever we ask for, whatever we are given from God's hands, we just have to remember that all of it – all of it – is meant to be shared. Whatever blessings we ask God for, whatever blessings God pours out on us, they are all meant to be shared in the same way that the life of Jesus Christ that he laid down for us is meant to be shared and laid down for our brothers and sisters. God promises to fill our lives with goodness and rest and life, and those blessings are meant to not stay with us but flow through us and out into the world all around – we're called to be conduits for those blessings, to redirect the good things we receive so that everyone around can enjoy what we have been given. If we try to supply the world's needs or fix the world's problems out of our

own abilities, out of our own energy, out of our own life, the task is hopeless, and we end up exhausted and disillusioned and empty. But when we let Jesus fill us up, when we rest in his strength and rely on his love, then we will find that we have enough to live and enough to share, enough to pass on what we've been given so the people around us can come to understand the life that comes through following Jesus Christ.

So if you're listening today, and you're at the end of your rope, you're exhausted, you're empty, you've laid down your life again and again and again and you've got nothing left to give, I want you to know that Jesus Christ wants to give you his life, his love, his strength, give you everything you need and enough to share. This is the love of Christ for you. This is what Jesus does best. So come and ask for what you need, and then pass it on to everyone you meet. In the name of Jesus Christ - Amen.