Easter IV

¹⁶We know love by this, that he laid down his life for us—and we ought to lay down our lives for one another. ¹⁷How does God's love abide in anyone who has the world's goods and sees a brother or sister in need and yet refuses help? ¹⁸Little children, let us love, not in word or speech, but in truth and action. ¹⁹And by this we will know that we are from the truth and will reassure our hearts before him

²⁰whenever our hearts condemn us; for God is greater than our hearts, and he knows everything. ²¹Beloved, if our hearts do not condemn us, we have boldness before God; ²²and we receive from him whatever we ask, because we obey his commandments and do what pleases him.

²³And this is his commandment, that we should believe in the name of his Son Jesus Christ and love one another, just as he has commanded us. ²⁴All who obey his commandments abide in him, and he abides in them. And by this we know that he abides in us, by the Spirit that he has given us.

In the name...

I've mentioned this before, perhaps—I don't recall. But there was a moment in time some twelve years ago in which I needed to finally defend my master's thesis in Charlotte, North Carolina at the very moment that my wife was to deliver a baby that we knew would likely need surgery. I had been sick for a hot minute with a parasite that I had yet to confess to my bride. I remember having to pause in the airport to regain my strength as I made my way to the rental car, but I wanted to get this thesis presentation done. Meanwhile, she was preparing the party of a lifetime to celebrate the 6 years it had taken me to finish the thesis while launching a school wracked with problems.

And then....a new problem erupted: a teacher scandal that required immediate dismissal, which meant that I was teaching all of sixth grade until further notice.

When I crawled into that dismissal of the teacher, something happened that I did not expect. I had beat myself up over all of the issues: if only I had gotten ahead of this issue, if only I had more experience, if only I wasn't sick and dumb, if only I wasn't distracted by a delayed Master's defense. If only, if only, if only. My heart was in total condemnation. But then something happened that I didn't expect. As I walked into our board room with that teacher, the Chairman of my Board was already sitting there. I sat down with my notes, ready to read the verdict, and instead, my board chair, knowing the

weight of the moment, the child soon to be born, the hours of writing that 100-page essay, pulled out his own piece of paper, and, on behalf of the board, did it for me as I sat in disbelief.

Relief born of substitutionary advocacy is a rarified and beautiful thing. It healed weeks of despair inside of 15 minutes. Someone else cared, and someone else was willing to do the hard thing. He took my burden.

When I was 17, I negotiated the purchase of a CJ 7 jeep that my dad was adamantly opposed to. I wanted it more than any of his suggestions that it was a piece of junk, and so he took my money and bought it for me with an eyeroll and a half. A week in, the jeep died at a stoplight, and the entire electrical system burned up in a single last breath. Best phone call of my life for my dad to come get me and get this thing towed. I remember the exact stop light. He looked at me that night fuming, and said only two things that I remember, "This is your fault." And then he paused. "but I will fix it." And then he convinced the seller to take it back and I bought I different car that he approved of.

Your heart is pre-programmed, on this side of a broken world, to condemn you. And your heart is not often wrong in finding what's wrong with you. A condemned heart is often accurate. I deal with it every day. But God is greater than your heart. God is fully happy in the atonement of Jesus. Condemnation is no longer a part of the relationship that God has with his children. Because condemnation has already been remedied through love. Which frees you not only from self-condemnation (according to John today), but from the condemnation of those around you who are not great. You are swimming in an ocean of people who need your daily forgiveness, because they are...not great. And mercy is always more powerful than sacrifice. For every annoyance in this life that provokes my inner eye-roll and cynicism towards the relative mediocrity of life, there is a billion times more joy in immediately offering mercy, mercy, mercy toward those who have otherwise been permanently offered the promises of God. And you need not be more reluctant than God. You will induce self-asphyxiation in straining the gnats of your fellow Christian as a way of life, versus opening your lungs to the rarified oxygen of forgiveness that keeps your spiritual pulse-ox at 100%. Whatever you give away in this life is exactly what you will receive back. Lead with the one who is greater than your heart. Open your life to the one who is greater than your

self-justifying, and therefore self-condemned heart. Breathe in the forest air of the One

who gave you breath in the first place.

now make sense. You are free to love

At this altar, you feast upon the sacred, bleeding, life-giving heart of Jesus. It's bigger than your heart. His heartbeat is the pulsating rhythm of everything from Jupiter's orbit to your rhythms of parenting an indifferent child. And the way to tune our hearts to his is to feast upon it. In the name...