

## Living in Love – by Rev Cameron D St.Michael

We have been talking about the journey that we are all on as we prepared for Christmas this year. We explored chasing peace, finding hope, seeking joy, and learning to trust. Tonight, we think about living in love. Because that is what Christmas is. Love. I don't want to go on too long tonight, because honestly, the love shown in this place is always going to be so much more than I can say. But I did want to share a few thoughts with you before this night is over.

I threw away my original draft, and then the 5 others after it. I kept throwing them away because none of them seemed to actually say what I was trying to say. That is, up until last night. Because I kept trying to come up with how we were looking at Christmas and looking at love, and I realized that my view kept changing. It was like I was spinning in a circle to keep up with myself, only to realize that Christmas is just that: a whirlwind.

Christmas is a strange time when we think about it, because there is just so much wrapped into it. In some ways, Christmas is about looking back. We look back to a child born in Bethlehem to save us all and set us free. We look back at Christmases that were before our time and recall the stories of others. Maybe it is story about family. Perhaps about gatherings of long ago and the greatest of friendships. It could be a story about a man visited by spirits to remind him of what Christmas is. Maybe it is a story about Santa Clause being put on trial. I might be a story about a man who thought the world would be better off without him. Perhaps a reindeer who didn't fit it well. Or a man who will jump to his death on Christmas Eve. Old army buddies singing about a white Christmas.

They all play an important part of our Christmas story. We recall our childhood and the things that made Christmas special. Going to see grandparents, playing with cousins, a favorite dish that you only had on Christmas, making cookies, opening presents, singing songs, country hayrides where your uncle sneaks you blackberry brandy, uncles and aunts playing games and laughing and telling stories of their childhood Christmas: it is all of these things as we look back. But it is also happening right now. This moment, we are living it all. We are creating new memories that will be cherished and shared. We celebrate old traditions and create new ones. Tonight, we remember our first Christmas memories, we remember those who aren't here with us to celebrate, and we create new memories. When we gather around to decorate Christmas cookies and try to avoid burning anything. We get out the old story books and share in those moments now. Wrapped up in those memories and traditions are the experiences we share around Christmas. We tell the story of Jesus birth, and it feels like it is happening this very night. But wait – there's more! We are also looking ahead. We look ahead as we create the memories and share the traditions, with the hope and joy of passing them along to others so that they become fond memories and shared traditions in many, many Christmas celebrations to come. We share our recipes and our songs so that they will all be enjoyed Christmas after Christmas. We are looking back, living in the moment, and looking far ahead! In all of it is love. Because in all of it, love is what we share. We start with a celebration of a child born to let us know how much we are loved. We carry it forward by sharing that love with others. And in the end, we are called home into those loving arms.

All of our Advent preparations have led us to this. Our journey to remember Christ coming into this world culminates in a celebration of a love so great that it conquers death itself. It is a journey to celebrate the journey we call life and the place that Christ has coming into our lives this very night! A journey to remember, to love, and to be remembered.

So, here is my simple advice to all of you, whether you want it or not. Don't hold back. Love like you mean it. Love like nothing is holding you back. Remind someone you care. Tell them how you feel! Love without limit. Don't hold back because God didn't hold back! God delivered that love so that we would forever remember that we are loved, and if we are loved then we can love! And if we can love, we should never love half-heartedly, but we should love just as deep and as big as we can! Give all you can knowing that God will always give you more love than you can ever give away! Be the help that you want to see in the world! Be the change you want to see in others! Be the love that you know you can be when you simply love the way that God loves YOU!

Because this is Christmas! Christ was born on Christmas day because you are worth loving! Christ came into this world to remind us all that we NEED love! That we aren't meant to do any of this alone, but we do it together. Just as we gather here tonight, a single candle in the darkness is hard to see, but when we pass that light around and share in what God has given us and we share in the love that God has shown us, that light fills up the night and overcomes the darkness. We don't love so that we feel loved because we are already loved regardless of if we love. And if we are already loved, why shouldn't we love? Live in that love. Love those who are sad. Love

those who are down. Love the oppressed. Love the immigrant. Love the widow. Love the orphan. Love the homeless. Love the hopeless. Love the sinner and the saint. Love by using your words. Love by giving to others. Love by caring for others. Love intentionally. Love spontaneously. But most importantly, love. Just love. Know that the God who brought us together to this place this very night is loving you right now. Love like the one thing you have to lose is the memory of a Savior who loved you before you could love and helped you before you could ask for help. Love like you mean it. Because God means it. Love was born on Christmas day and love is born in us today, and love will be born into the world forever more. So let us love one another. Amen.