

Thankful for Love

Season of Thanks: Part 4 “Thankful for Love”

Rev. Cameron D St. Michael – December 18, 2022

4th Sunday of Advent

Readings: Isaiah 7:10-16; Romans 1:1-7; Matthew 1:18-25

Reflection: Psalm 80

Greeting: Go up on a high mountain, messenger Zion! Raise your voice and shout, messenger Jerusalem! Raise your voice and don't be afraid; Say to the cities of Judah, “Here is your God!” (Isaiah 40:9)

Prayer: In this season of Advent, we give thanks that you are with us, Lord. We come together to prepare for our Emmanuel, our God with us, that we may ready our hearts in your presence. Let us remember the words of the prophets as we prepare our hearts for hope, peace, joy, and love and help us to be thankful for the many ways you have blessed us and kept us. Strengthen us by your steadfast faithfulness that we may boldly proclaim your message of salvation. My we worship you in a spirit of truth and may we learn to love one another as we grow in our love for you, through Jesus Christ our savior. Amen.

Reflection: Psalm 80

Give ear, O Shepherd of Israel, you who lead Joseph like a flock! You who are enthroned upon the cherubim, shine forth before Ephraim and Benjamin and Manasseh. Stir up your might, and come to save us! Restore us, O God; let your face shine, that we may be saved. O Lord God of hosts, how long will you be angry with your people's prayers? You have fed them with the bread of tears and given them tears to drink in full measure. You make us the scorn of our neighbors; our enemies laugh among themselves. Restore us, O God of hosts; let your face shine, that we may be saved. You brought a vine out of Egypt; you drove out the nations and planted it. You cleared the ground for it; it took deep root and filled the land. The mountains were covered with its shade, the mighty cedars with its branches; it sent out its branches to the sea and its shoots to the River. Why then have you broken down its walls, so that all who pass along the way pluck its fruit? The boar from the forest ravages it, and all that move in the field feed on it. Turn again, O God of hosts; look down from heaven and see; have regard for this vine, the stock that your right hand planted. It has been burned with fire; it has been cut down; may they perish at the rebuke of your countenance. But let your hand be upon the one at your right hand, the one whom you made strong for yourself. Then we will never turn back from you; give us life, and we will call on your name. Restore us, O Lord God of hosts; let your face shine, that we may be saved.
(Psalm 80 NRSV*)

We read the words of the 80th Psalm and we hear God's salvation and restoration. We hear the people cry out asking God to deliver them. We remember God's mighty acts as we call upon God to remember us in our time of need. What is your prayer when you are in need? Do you pray for others who are in need of God's grace? How can we come together in love to celebrate Christ? How can we share in the hope of Christ this Advent?

Prayer: O God, help us to make this Advent be a season of thanks. May you help us to prepare our hearts for the coming of our Savior. May we find hope, peace, joy, and love as we share in your blessing. We ask that as we lay our joys and concerns before you that you will strengthen us by your spirit. We pray that you'll be with us in celebration and sorrow. May your love lift us up in both laughter and tears. And from the darkness may we see your great light in Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen.

Now let the words of our mouths, and the meditations of our hearts be acceptable in your sight, O Lord, our Rock and our Redeemer. Amen.

Sermon:

Our scripture readings for today come from the New Revised Standard Version Bible. Our first reading for today comes from Isaiah chapter 7 verses 10 through 16.

Again the Lord spoke to Ahaz, saying, "Ask a sign of the Lord your God; let it be deep as Sheol or high as heaven." But Ahaz said, "I will not ask, and I will not put the Lord to the test." Then Isaiah said, "Hear then, O house of David! Is it too little for you to weary mortals that you weary my God also? Therefore the Lord himself will give you a sign. Look, the young woman is with child and shall bear a son and shall name him Immanuel. He shall eat curds and honey by the time he knows how to refuse the evil and choose the good. For before the child knows how to refuse the evil and choose the good, the land before whose two kings you are in dread will be deserted. (Isaiah 7:10-16 NRSV)*

Our next reading for today comes from Romans chapter 1 verses 1 through 7.

Paul, a servant of Christ Jesus, called to be an apostle, set apart for the gospel of God, which he promised beforehand through his prophets in the holy scriptures, the gospel concerning his Son, who was descended from David according to the flesh and was declared to be Son of God with power according to the spirit of holiness by resurrection from the dead, Jesus Christ our Lord, through whom we have received grace and apostleship to bring about the obedience of faith among all the gentiles for the sake of his name, including you who are called to belong to Jesus Christ, To all God's beloved in Rome, who are called to be saints: Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. (Romans 1:1-7 NRSV)*

Our last reading for today comes from Matthew chapter 1 verses 18 through 25.

Now the birth of Jesus the Messiah took place in this way. When his mother Mary had been engaged to Joseph, but before they lived together, she was found to be pregnant from the Holy Spirit. Her husband Joseph, being a righteous man and unwilling to expose her to public disgrace, planned to divorce her quietly. But just when he had resolved to do this, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in

a dream and said, "Joseph, son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary as your wife, for the child conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. She will bear a son, and you are to name him Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins." All this took place to fulfill what had been spoken by the Lord through the prophet: "Look, the virgin shall become pregnant and give birth to a son, and they shall name him Emmanuel," which means, "God is with us." When Joseph awoke from sleep, he did as the angel of the Lord commanded him; he took her as his wife but had no marital relations with her until she had given birth to a son, and he named him Jesus. (Matthew 1:18-25 NRSV)*

This is the word of God for the people of God. Thanks be to God.

We come to this final Sunday of Advent, and we celebrate being thankful for love. And this really is the culmination of everything that we have been thankful for during this Advent season. Because love is the reason that we have hope. Love is the reason that we can find peace. Love is the reason that we have joy. And I think it is important for us to recognize that love and to share that love and to understand the love that we celebrate on Christmas. As we begin to look at that love, we look at our readings for today. We're going to start with Paul's letter to the Romans because Paul is celebrating that he is a servant of Jesus Christ. He is celebrating that he is declaring the good news of God's son. That he is celebrating the grace and the love that comes from following Christ. And honestly, this introduction is one that is sent in love. I think it helps us to remember the kind of love that we are celebrating, because it is a love that stems from God's love. And we remember it when we remember the birth of our Savior. And that's the focus of our gospel reading today. On Christmas Eve we will hear the familiar story from Luke that covers the best-known account of the birth of Christ. But today we have the accounting of Christ's birth from Matthew. We see a mirror of this in our reading from Isaiah, because Isaiah talks about a sign. That the young woman is with child and will bear a son and named him Emmanuelle. A sign of God's love for His people. And in Matthew we hear of the way that the birth of Jesus took place. Mary and Joseph were engaged. Mary finds she's pregnant by the Holy Spirit, and Joseph decides that it is best to quietly end the engagement. But an angel of the Lord comes to Joseph and tells him not to be afraid because she will bear a son and Joseph is to name him Jesus, for he will save his people from all their sins. And here we see the verse from Isaiah again. That this boy will be God with us.

And there's really not much to this account. At least not when we think about all the different stories that we have and the narratives that we give. It is just the fact that he is born, and he is born to share God's great love for his people. It really is an amazing thing though. And sometimes I think we let it slip by us, this amazing love. Because it can be overshadowed by so many things. As we prepare ourselves for Christmas, there are so many things that we do. We can do so much and get so busy that we forget to love. What do I mean by this? We can get wrapped up in planning and scheduling. We can get focused on making sure that we have all of the gifts purchased, everything ordered, and everything here on time, everything mailed out. Christmas cards have been sent, the cookies have been baked, everything is prepared, and everything is ready. But what about us? The tree may be adorned with lights but

is your heart adorned with love? There are presents under the tree but is there a presence in your heart that brings you joy? Even though the treats have been made, have you found a way to make peace in your heart? We may be ready to give gifts but are we ready to give hope? And I think those are important questions for us. I think they're important questions because it gets to the heart of the matter. Are we living in Christ's love as we celebrate his birth? I think it's important that we do ask these questions. Because Advent is a time where we prepare ourselves for the coming of Christ into this world, both in his birth and both in his redeeming grace for all people. That all people may know hope. That all people may know peace. That all people may know joy. That all people may know love through Christ's great love, through God's love in sending Christ to this world, knowing love brought to us by the Holy Spirit. We celebrate it in the simple birth of a child because it is a sign that God is with us. And if God is with us than we can afford to be generous. We can afford to love recklessly. Because if God is with us what more could we need? What more could we want?

And I reflected on all this as I began to think about what the love of Christ means to me on Christmas. For me, it's that by knowing hope, peace, joy, and love I can share all of those things. That I can be a voice bringing good news to the downtrodden and the poor. That I can be a voice standing up for the least and the last. That I can be a peaceful presence. That I can bring joy. That I can share hope and that I can do it all in love. Because Christ is with me. And if Christ is with me, I can do anything. And for me that's the joy of Christmas. A child born to set us free. Our Emmanuel - our God with us. With us in love. With us in a love that overcomes all obstacles. A love that overcomes hate. A love that overcomes division. A love that overcomes fear. A love that withstands attack. A love that celebrates diversity. A love meant for all people. A love meant to be shared. A love that multiplies. The love of Christmas is the miracle that we are not bound by our worst traits. We are no longer slaves to sin and death. The love of Christmas is the miracle that we can be forgiven for all our sins. And that gives me hope. Hope that if I can be forgiven, all can be forgiven. And if all can be forgiven, that means that all may find and know peace in their hearts. If all can be forgiven and all can find peace, then we may celebrate that love and the joy that it inspires in each of us. We do so knowing all that God has done so that we may celebrate. And that as we celebrate, we do so knowing that Christ will always be with us. So, as we prepare our hearts for the coming of the Lord, let us do so by remembering all that God's love means for us so that we may share that love with all. Let us remember how that love has impacted our lives that we may share it so that it may impact the lives of others in the same way. As we prepare our hearts for that love, let us remember that that love was offered to us freely. And as we prepare our hearts for Christmas, let us remember all that has been done for us so that we may know hope, peace, joy, and love. And let us remember that we may share hope, peace, joy, and love freely. And may we share in the birth of our Savior, born to set us free so that we may truly know love and we may truly give love this Christmas. Amen.

Prayer of Confession and Pardon: God, you are with us even when we turn away from you. Guide us back into your loving arms. Judge us not by the perfection of our actions but show us mercy and love. We have strayed like lost sheep from your ways, failing both in what we have done and what we have failed to do. Bring us back into your fold that you may guide us and lead us in all things. For the sake of your Son, Jesus Christ, have mercy upon us and forgive us. May we walk in your love and trust your ways. Amen.

Almighty God have mercy upon you. May the Lord forgive all your sins and lift you up in love through Jesus Christ our Lord, and by the Holy Spirit keep you in life eternal. Amen.

Offering: If you are so moved to make an offering, you may send it to the church treasurer, or you may send it to the PO Box listed below. We are still the church, and the church still needs your support to keep doing all the important work that we do.

Lord's Prayer

Dismissal with Blessing: May we go forth reflecting God's love in our lives as we go forth in the peace of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Our Current Series – Season of Thanks

Our current series is a look at the ways that God is a part of our lives, and all that God can do. We will spend five weeks exploring the ways that God acts. In them, we will see the ways God responds to us and how we can respond to God.

November 27th – *Thankful for Hope* – Isaiah 2:1-5; Romans 13:11-14; Matthew 24:36-44

December 4th – *Thankful for Peace* – Isaiah 11:1-10; Romans 15:4-13; Matthew 3:1-12

December 13th – *Thankful for Joy* – Isaiah 35:1-10; James 5:7-10; Matthew 11:2-11

December 18th – *Thankful for Love* – Isaiah 7:10-16; Romans 1:1-7; Matthew 1:18-25

December 24th – *Thankful for a Child* – Isaiah 9:2-7; Titus 2:11-14; Luke 2:1-20

Prayer List

Rev Charliam Renner	Bishop Frank Beard	Our Conference	Our Healthcare Workers
Patti Corder and the Greenup Ambulance Crew		Eric Veach	Ed & Verna Titus
Henry Catey	Jake Kiser	Cindy Cisney	Tricia Adkins
Don Stewart	Ronnie Winstead	Lauren Stewart	Phyllis Gabel
Ruth Ann Finley	Tom Finley	Laura Carlen	Rosie Chancellor
Kenny Holmes	Chuck Hogan	Brittany Gilbert	Jeremy Klinger
Phil Hawickhorst	Ray Carr	Jane Williams	Alice Sherwood
Dean Carlen	Ross Matteson	Richard Durham	Carol Miller
Donna Carlen	Emily Blade	Tim Schnauzer	Steve Carlen
Connie Brown	Family of Leroy Kemper	Kyle Lehman	Kathy Hanks
Gary & Mary Winterrowd	Leo Smith	Sue & Bob Smyser	Larry Thompson
Nick & Leana Ochoa	Evelyn Sue Icenogle	Kristen & Zach Morecraft	Greg Williams
Martha Roberts	Charlie & Charlotte Baxter	Paul Schulte	

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