

“LOVE”

Pastor Mike Corwin

4th SUNDAY OF ADVENT

TEXT: LUKE 2:15-20

GOD’S WORD: JOHN 3:16

I – LOVE:

I could give you all kinds of sappy definitions of love this morning. I could repeat the fancy slogans for Valentine’s Day or Sweetest Day if I really wanted to. But the LOVE I want to speak of this morning isn’t a love memorialized by Hallmark in a card, or by a vase of flowers, or a box of candy...it’s one that comes by actions. It’s an emotion you have to experience to fully understand it. It’s an emotion someone has to give to you, which is only fitting since it’s one of the gifts of Christmas. We light the love candle last because I believe it is the greatest gift we receive with the birth of Jesus...LOVE.

For those of you who have children or grandchildren, or have taken care of or helped a child you will understand what I’m saying by what happened when that little one was hurting, when he or she was in pain, or when they cried out in some kind of anguish. When that happened you didn’t just stand up and tower over them and dwarf them with your size to prove you are the adult and know better than they that it will be all right.

No! You go to them, you kneel down, you hold your arms out, and call to them to come to you to be comforted. To come so they will feel compassion...so they will know love. As they are held in your arms, and bury their head in your chest

or on your shoulder they know that emotion of love. As their sobs subside and their little body quits quivering they feel and know love even if they can't explain it yet.

And sometimes we need this same love as adults too don't we? We sometimes need someone to hold us and assure us it will be Okay.

II – CHRISTMAS LOVE:

If you can understand that, then you can understand what was going on that first Christmas so long ago. Because that was what God was doing. On that day in the stable, when his one and only Son Jesus was born to Mary, God bent low to the earth so he could hold us in his arms and let us know how much he loved us. He lowered himself to our level, made himself approachable, and opened his arms as he called to his children, all his children to come to him and be comforted. He's been calling to us ever since that day to come to him and find real and everlasting love.

The essence of Christmas is love. God's incredible love for his creation...his people...his children. It is about God coming to kneel down on earth and comforting his crying children. Of letting them know that no matter where they've been, or what they've done, he still loves them and still longs to hold them and return them to that love. Our love for him may waiver, but his never does.

That's what the reading from John says so well. That one verse is memorized by just about everyone who has ever gone to church sometime in their life. It is said that the entire Gospel is contained in that one verse of Scripture. And in that one verse we see the motivation behind the birth of Jesus... "FOR GOD SO LOVED THE WORLD." It doesn't say because he had nothing better to do that day. It doesn't say that we were a bunch of misfits and delinquents who

couldn't fix ourselves. It doesn't say that he needed to give us a reason to love Him. It says that he loved us – period!

III – TEXT:

I think it's LOVE I see in the conclusion of the Christmas shepherd story.

Luke 2:15-20 (NLT)

¹⁵ When the angels had returned to heaven, the shepherds said to each other, "Let's go to Bethlehem! Let's see this thing that has happened, which the Lord has told us about." ¹⁶ They hurried to the village and found Mary and Joseph. And there was the baby, lying in the manger. ¹⁷ After seeing him, the shepherds told everyone what had happened and what the angel had said to them about this child. ¹⁸ All who heard the shepherds' story were astonished, ¹⁹ but Mary kept all these things in her heart and thought about them often. ²⁰ The shepherds went back to their flocks, glorifying and praising God for all they had heard and seen. It was just as the angel had told them.

Two weeks ago we talked about the gift of PEACE and we looked at the story of the angels singing to the shepherds about Peace on Earth, Goodwill towards men. Last week we spoke about the gift of JOY and we looked at the beginning of the story and I told you the joy the shepherds must have felt after they quit being terrified and realized that out of all of humanity God had chosen to tell them first about the birth of his Son, the Messiah. That no one was below or beyond his touch and his Salvation.

Now we look at the end of the story. The shepherds must have been full of joy to leave the sheep they were watching and run to the city of Bethlehem. They wanted to see this gift for themselves. And when they got there the scene they found wasn't just one of hope, peace, and joy, but I believe they found love there too. They saw a mother, a father, and little baby all together. When they saw this baby with their own eyes then they knew the angels weren't playing

some kind of a heavenly hoax. They knew that God loved the world and had fulfilled his prophecy that a Messiah would come and that he would save his people from their sins and oppression. God had kept his promise and sent his love.

IV – CHRISTMAS IS LOVE:

Christmas is love. Where we find love we experience Christmas.

- When we love God as we should with all of our heart, mind, and soul...there is Christmas. Just as the shepherds did as they went to the stable and saw love in the form of a baby and then went back to their flocks praising and glorifying God for this wonderful gift to humanity.
- When we love our families as we should...there is Christmas. Just as the shepherds were drawn to the stable and found not just a baby, but a holy family, we are drawn to our homes and our families who are a gift of God to love.
- When we love others as we are commanded to...there is Christmas. When we share the story of the Gospel, as the shepherds did of the beginning of the Good News, we share God's love.

Whenever and wherever we receive God's sacrificial love...whenever and wherever we pass it on to others...whenever and wherever God's love is accepted and shared...Christmas comes once again. AMEN

V – SHARE THE LOVE:

Pastor Becky will tell us how we can share the love with others.