

Sunday, December 24, 2023 ADVENT 4 *“Who do you love?”*

**Psalm 89:1-4, 19-26 Luke 2:1-20**

This is a complicated day from a liturgical perspective as this morning we recognize the Fourth Sunday of Advent and then later this evening our focus will shift because it will be Christmas Eve. It seems that we kind of lost a week of preparations for this special season but this is reality of today. There is an excitement in the air—there is also a lot of traffic in the roads and people moving about. People are busy- preparing for family gatherings, eating and relaxing, our church family is getting for a special worship service tonight as we will be worshipping with our friends from the Windsor Korean church who shares our building as well as a time of singing Christmas hymns and Holy Communion. When we anticipate such gatherings what are the emotions in our hearts? Is there anxiety or wonder, worry and stress or just a let it be kind of moment? OR maybe just maybe there is something deeper that one does not usually articulate well or often.. Love. Philia love, a love of brothers and sisters in Christ; a common emotion of adoration for the child born in a manger and the Christ of the empty tomb!

As we have lit the Advent candles each week we have been focusing on the gifts each represents with respect to Jesus being born into human history. Hope, Peace, Joy and Love. Why is the love candle the last of the 4 gifts in Christ? Isn't what we are called to do based in love? Yes, but what does this mean?

When we consider Hope, Peace, Joy and love we must acknowledge that each one builds upon the previous one. Without hope there is no peace, nor joy nor love. We need hope first. We need that thrill of hope that comes because of the unexpected or the fulfilment of a promise or a desire that might come to fruition one day. We need hope to seek us through the darkest times so that at some time love may be restored and renewed. We also need peace—without hope, peace is not possible. There has to be a catalyst for bringing about change; there needs to be a desire to see beyond the now moment into a time to come or a change to come.

When signs of peace are shared or erected there still has to be that desire- that hope to make it happen. It is not enough to say peace—is what we want, the need and desire has to be put forth with hope. Such is the story from the First World War which had been raging on for four months. The weather that December was cold and wet. Many of the trenches were continually flooded, soldiers were covered in mud and exposed to frostbite and trench foot that seemed impossible to get rid of. They were dreading having to spend Christmas away from their families. Then something incredible happened on December 24, 1914. Soldiers from both sides

put down their weapons, stepped out of their trenches and enemy really did meet enemy between the trenches. For a short time, there was peace.

There were many truces along the Western Front that Christmas, but the truce was not total. Shelling and firing continued in some parts and there were deaths on Christmas Day. Some of the truces had been arranged on Christmas Eve while others were arranged on Christmas Day. There were even arrangements which included a ruling as to when the truce would end. Along many parts of the Front Line, the truce was brought about by the arrival of miniature Christmas trees in the German trenches. Jovial voices could be heard calling out from both friendly and enemy trenches, followed by requests not to fire, then shadows of soldiers could be seen gathering in no man's land, laughing, joking and exchanging gifts. Amongst the joy, there was sadness to the truce as both sides used this opportunity to seek out the bodies of their dead comrades and give them a decent burial.

The Christmas Truce of 1914 was not a unique occasion in military history. It was a return of a long established tradition. It is common in conflicts with close quarters and prolonged periods of fighting for informal truces and generous gestures to take place between enemies. Similar events have occurred in other conflicts throughout history—and they continue to occur. And we know that today there are a lot of prayers for a Christmas Truce in both Russia-Ukraine and in Israel-Palestine and Gaza.

Even in those moments of peace in the midst of war there was joy. Hope lead to peace and to moments of joy. When enemies were seen as people and human beings were all missing the wonder of Christmas and what a difference the light of a Christmas tree meant.

As we lit the 4<sup>th</sup> Candle of Love this morning- we can understand how hope, peace, joy and love build up together. To have love- there needs to be peace and joy comes when reconciliation occurs and there is hope. But who do you love? There have been many rock songs through the years asking people about their relationships with others on earth. And we all have people we love—some closer than others but what is amazing is that love comes in different forms—based upon whom we speak about and know. Young couples gush when we mention love, people will tell you everything about their cat or dog, and even about a story or movie which was enjoyed. But to truly know love means to have the deep overflowing feelings of faithfulness to God that you want to pass it on.. This love is from God to God and in the name of God. IT is because of God's love that we are here today and at all. IT is because God loves

His creation that we can say we are gathered in the name of love at this time. And we are asked that question who do you love? And do you love God?

For a number of years we had the Latin words of CARITATE DEI put on top of the exit doors at the sanctuary here in Glenwood. These words mean 'out of love of and for God 'we enter the world to serve Him. But how do we do this if we do not have hope, peace and joy?

We need to find it again! Just like Peter did. For we remember that prior to Jesus' trial and crucifixion, Peter denied know Jesus at all. Peter also hid during the time of Jesus' death on the cross. He was not seen. Yet after Jesus rose from death he met the disciples on the beach for breakfast. During their conversation, Jesus asks," Do you love me more than these?" A second time he asks, "DO you love me?" and then the third time he again asks," Do you love me?" Jesus then said, "Feed my sheep" each time. But each time he was asked, Peter answered, "Yes, Lord." This same questions is asked of you as we prepare to remember Jesus' birth into human history; Jesus' birth to bring about change to all people.

Yet as we anticipate his birth we need to look at who do you love? We are thankful for Mary and Joseph who agreed to what would occur for their lives changed from being just a carpenter and his wife starting married life together. They became parents of the Messiah! What responsibilities they would have—to keep him safe, from Herod, from strangers, from those who wanted him to be put to death. But they loved him as parents ought to love their child.

When Jesus was older he taught us how to love with compassion, care and wonder. He also taught us to have hope, to share peace in his name and to experience the joy of life. And by doing this we know whom we should love.. God- Father Son and Spirit others and ourselves.

As we share in this 4<sup>th</sup> Sunday of Advent, let us love others and tell others of God's love for us all given to us in Jesus the baby born to become our Saviour and Messiah.

Let us pray.

Holy God we praise you and thank you for your love for us in sending your Son Jesus to live a human life. Help us to receive him once again as Christmas is soon here. Bless us O God with the gifts of advent given in Jesus- so that we are enabled to experience hope, peace, joy and love in a renewed manner. Hear our prayers as we learn again whom we should love.

SILENCE. Amen.