Love (Second Sunday of Advent)

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Date: 06 December 2020

Preacher: Pastor Scott Johnson

[0:00] The Thank you.

Thank you.

Thank you.

Thank you.

Thank you.

[2:58] Thank you.

Thank you.

Thank you.

Thank you.

Do not be afraid. Do not be afraid to love, to love, to love. Something new is about to be born.

[5:09] Let us pray.

Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.

Amen. Amen. Amen.

Amen. Amen. Amen.

Amen. Amen. Someone to give direction for this unparalleled road.

[7:03] Or one who says, follow me and I will lead you home. How beautiful, how precious, the Savior of all.

To love so completely, a loneliest soul. How gently, how tenderly, He says to one and all.

Child, you can follow me and I will lead you home. Trust me and follow me and I will lead you home.

Be near me, Lord Jesus. I ask Thee to stay. Close by Thee forever.

And love me, I pray. Bless all the dear children. May my tender care.

[8:23] And take us to heaven to live with Thee there. Take us to heaven to live with Thee there.

Good morning.

Good morning. Do you feel like you've gotten a gift already with the music this morning? How beautiful it is. Yay. There's nothing in this season of Advent that moves us sometimes more than the music of the season.

And even when it's a song that we might not know, part of not singing helps us to go with that music with our heart and our mind.

And so we are very grateful. As we come to this time of just talking about the offering this morning, you've probably seen the ways that you can give online, bring money and put it in the box, send a check, all of those kinds of things.

[9:42] And we invite people, whether you're here or watching from home, to fill out a friendship card when you get a chance. That's where we get our blessings that we scroll on the screen at the beginning of the service.

And we're glad to share those. I want to highlight a couple of things this morning. One is our angel tree gifts. Some of you, many of you have already given.

And there's a bunch of gifts back there against the back wall. We are still in need of, oh, probably we have 70 kids.

So the idea is that we have 140 gifts, two gifts per child. So we welcome your participation in that. The tags are on the trees. So I invite you to take one.

Or if you know somebody who's not coming to church but might like to do that, see if you can arrange to get them one of those tags. You can come to the church during the week and ring the doorbell and somebody will either give you a tag or take your gift and put it where it needs to be.

[10:49] So thank you. The other thing I wanted to share about is what we call the Good Samaritan Fund. And this is an opportunity to give to a fund that helps when people in our community come to us and need some extra help to get through a tough time or for a particular expense that they have.

And that is just a special offering that we remind people. People can give any time to it. But it's something that I wanted to share with you. We are going to share in some very special music in a couple of minutes.

But what I'd like to do is to invite us to just pause. And then we're going to do the doxology. And then I will pray. So let's just pause in a moment of gratitude.

I invite you to stand for the doxology as you are able.

And then I will pray.

[12:14] Oh, wonderful God, we give you thanks.

We give you thanks that we are here. Whether we are here online or in person, we give you thanks for the very air that we breathe into our bodies.

For the life that it brings and for the love that we can share. We may not always be able to share it together, oh Lord, but we can share our love because you loved us first.

So we give and we offer our hearts and our lives in love for you, our Lord Jesus Christ. Amen. You may be seated.

Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.

[13:24] Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.

Amen. I have traveled many moonless nights Cold and weary with a babe inside And I wonder what I've done Holy Father, you have come And chosen me now to carry your Son I am waiting In a silent prayer

I am frightened By the Lord I bear In a world as cold as stone Must I walk this path alone?

Be with me now Be with me now Breath of heaven Hold me together Be forever near me Breath of heaven Breath of heaven Do you wonder Do you wonder I am For over me your holiness For you are holy Breath of heaven Do you wonder

Do you wonder As you watch my face If a wiser one Should have had my place?

[16:25] Should have had my place But I offer all I am For the mercy of your plan Help me be strong Help me Help me Breath of heaven Hold me together Be forever near me Breath of heaven Breath of heaven Light in my darkness

Pour over me Pour over me Your holiness For you are holy For you are holy Breath of heaven Hold me together Be forever near me Breath of heaven Breath of heaven Breath of heaven Breath of heaven Light in my darkness Pour over me Your holiness For you are holy For you are holy

Breath of heaven Breath of heaven Uways With najbardziej Through obviité I invite you to join your hearts with mine in prayer.

Oh, breath of heaven, hold us together. Bind us to you and to one another in this time where things happen that are both expected and unexpected.

Changes around us and changes within us that are hard. People grow sick and we cannot always be with them.

[19:46] People are weary and tired. And, oh, Lord, we pray for your breath, the breath of heaven, to surround them with comfort that we so often cannot give.

All around us, in the midst of the craziness and chaos, the ordinary, everyday things of life, tests, medical tests, school tests, challenges, relationship challenges, all of those things, they still happen, oh, Lord.

Lord, so send your breath of heaven so that in the expected and the unexpected, we may find comfort in your presence.

We cannot do this life on our own. remind us that we can need you, we can want you, and we can pray for your love on this day of love to surround us here and everywhere.

And, Lord, we pray for that same love to surround those we cannot see or hear or touch. Breath of heaven, hold us together this day and send us, when the time comes from this place, love and strengthened and encouraged.

[21:23] Because you came, you came to us in the beauty of a child, in the love of a father, and in the saving grace of a savior.

We pray and give thanks and offer ourselves in Jesus' name. Amen. Good morning.

Today's reading is from the book of Matthew, chapter 1, verses 18 through 24, and from Isaiah, chapter 7, verse 14.

This is how the birth of Jesus the Messiah came about. His mother Mary was pledged to be married to Joseph, but before they came together, she was found to be pregnant through the Holy Spirit.

Because Joseph, her husband, was faithful to the law and yet did not want to expose her to public disgrace, he had a mind to divorce her quietly.

[22:52] But after he had considered 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 home as your wife, because what is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit.

She will give birth to a son, and you are to give him the name Jesus, because he will save his people from their sins. All this took place to fulfill what the Lord had said through the prophet.

The virgin will conceive and give birth to a son, and they will call him Emmanuel, which means God with us. When Joseph woke up, he did what the angel of the Lord had commanded him and took Mary home as his wife.

Therefore, the Lord himself will give you a sign. The virgin will conceive and give birth to a son, and will call him Emmanuel. This is the word of the Lord.

Thanks be to God. Amen. Amen. Good morning, church.

[24:12] Let's pray together. Almighty and gracious God, we give you thanks for this moment, for this time. We have praised your name. We have heard your word. We have prayed together.

And now with our hearts open, we pray that you would plant a seed in us. A seed that will grow and bear fruit for the honor and glory of your name. Amen. Through Jesus Christ, our Lord, we pray.

Amen. So, here we are in the second week of Advent. This week, we're focusing on love as the theme. We talked about hope last week. This week, we're talking about love.

So, to get started, I figured I'd ask a really simple question related to love. How many of you are loving your 2020 so far? Oh, I got laughs, but I didn't see any hands go up.

Kind of a very telling thing, right? That we would find ourselves in this place, this deep into 2020, because, you know, it only has a few weeks left.

[25:16] And nobody's using the word love to describe their journey over these 12 months so far. Now, there's probably things about 2020 that you may have loved. But I'm guessing that when we look across the whole spectrum, what we're seeing here is not something we would describe as a year that we loved.

That's tough. I mean, we all know the realities we're living in. The reality of this pandemic has touched everything about our lives. We have seen people struggling economically.

We have seen people struggling with issues of social justice and racial justice. We have dealt with the ongoing strife after our election. And so, yeah, it's hard to use the word love to talk about this year.

We're still in the middle of all of this. But when we think about a year we love, when we think about the way love works in our lives, do we actually need things to go perfectly to love a thing?

Or are we grappling with the reality that we just had so many plans, so many expectations, so much that we had thought was going to work a certain way, and just hasn't in 2020?

[26:31] I mean, we've all felt some degree of loss. Some people have felt lost in the most real of ways, because there are empty chairs at their tables. But all of us have probably felt some degree of loss in terms of things we were expecting that just didn't come to fruition.

So there's a reason why we say we're just not loving our 2020 to this point. And I want us to think about that idea of our unmet expectations and how they match up with our sense of whether or not we would love this year or not, or whether we would love a moment we're in.

Because we bring so much to the table, but then God tends to move in God's own way. And what we experience in the story that we're studying this morning has a pretty powerful lesson for us, I think, around what it means to know love in this season.

Not only this season we're in as people now, but this special season of preparation and expectation as we move toward the manger.

So let's talk a little bit about Joseph, because that's the scripture we read today. And it's interesting as we get to Joseph's story, because while we hear his name a lot, we don't really know a lot about Joseph.

[28:00] And the thing is, when we get into the story, we come to Matthew 18, what we see here is that Matthew is offering his own take on Jesus' birth.

Now we know we get the much longer version of the Christmas story from Luke. Mark doesn't talk about it, and John doesn't talk about it. But we get the much longer version in Luke. So what Matthew focuses on is this.

And he says, when his mother Mary was pledged to be married to Joseph, but before they came together, she was found to be pregnant through the Holy Spirit.

Okay? So we need to just unpack that a little bit. I think some of us who have done some work, some deeper study of the Bible, get why that's important. But we've got to understand a few things.

If we look at this story with 20-20 eyes, we kind of think, well, what's going on? They were engaged, and they just weren't married yet, which is technically true. But we've got to put a little more around that story.

[29:00] So to understand the culture of the time, you've got to recognize that Joseph, we don't really know how old he was. But what we know from anthropological studies and other biblical studies is that most men got married around the age of 18 at that time.

Okay? He could have been as young as 13. But most men got married around the age of 18. Mary would have been younger than him. It would have been unusual for him to marry someone his own age.

So she, too, could have been as young as 12. But she would have probably been in her early teens. So these two came together, and they were betrothed.

Now, we have our own sense of what it means to get engaged in 2020 U.S. culture. But a betrothal in this point in Israel was much more a business arrangement than it was a romantic find-your-soul-mate kind of arrangement.

Families would have come together, and they would have worked out a couple of different layers of business deal, and then they would have had this contract that would have been binding. And then there was about a year before a couple would move into the same house and have the wedding, and then that would have been when they were really considered married.

[30:17] However, in the eyes of the culture, when you were betrothed, essentially people treated you like you were married, even if you weren't living together. Okay? So this is where Joseph and Mary are.

Now, what we also know from other parts of the story is that, going back to Luke's version, that Mary's been, had her own visit from an angel, and she's gone off to visit her relative, Elizabeth.

So she's been gone for a while. So now, if you're this betrothed guy, and you're sitting here, and all of a sudden your betrothed has decided, you know what, I'm taking a trip, I'll be gone for a while.

That kind of breaks the expectation. That would have been a little unusual. That's not what being betrothed feels like. That's a bit out of the norm.

So, Joseph is kind of sitting here in his own feelings, wondering about how loved he really is at this point. But, she's gone, and we know where she's going, so we're going to be okay.

Then, the drama happens. Because, Mary gets back home. And, while we don't know how many people would have known about what we're going to loosely term the secret, clearly, Mary's parents and Joseph knew about the secret.

And, that secret is, is that she can't hide the fact that she's pregnant now. Now, we bring our own 2020 senses of how weird that would feel if somebody you were in, showed up pregnant.

But, this is a much bigger deal during this time period. Because, as we said, because of that contract side of the betrothal, she's considered to have committed adultery.

And, adultery in that culture is a capital offense. She could have literally been dragged into the street and stoned to death. Most of us are familiar with that part of the story.

But, that's where she is. But, that's why the line that follows is so important. So, verse 19, it says, because Joseph, her husband, see, he calls her her husband, even though they're not together yet.

[32:46] He calls him her husband. But, Joseph, her husband, was faithful to the law, and yet, did not want to expose her to public disgrace.

He had an option to divorce her quietly. So, here's where Joseph sits. He's already been kind of put off by this idea that she disappeared for a few months.

And now, she comes back, pray. So, if you're Joseph, you're probably thinking, she did cheat on him.

What else would you think? Now, he could do the public thing, but, he decides to do the quiet thing. Because, the only thing he can do, if he wants to be an upstanding, righteous mind, in the eyes of his culture, and probably in his own mind, is he says, well, I can't sign off on this.

If I take her home, I'm essentially saying what she did is okay, and I get played for a fool. So, he says, well, we could do the public thing, but, at a minimum, we're going to do the quiet thing.

[33:56] because the only way you can resolve this is to break the contract, which is the false. So, Matthew tells us, Joseph was planning to resolve it quietly.

That was his plan. Now, that, none of that, feels much like love. None of that, meets the expectations, that most people would bring to the table.

And, here's this guy. And, you know, 18 is one thing to us, but 18, he's a grown up in that culture. He's further down the pike, than we would consider an 18 year old.

And so, he's pretty, broken up about this. At a minimum, he's got to be somewhat heartbroken. You would think, on a certain level, he'd be pretty, angry.

But, he decides to do this quietly. And then, when he's at home, by himself, one night, probably in the house, he is building, to live in, with his family.

[35:12] God breaks him. God shows up, and has something to say, about this. God says, don't be afraid, to take Mary as your wife.

What's conceived in her, is of the Holy Spirit. And, goes on to give him, the lesson, and remind him, of prophecy. Now, that's pretty, frightening.

It's a pretty big deal, to have God show up, and tell you, that I know, what you're feeling. I know, what you must be thinking. But, I want you to do this anyway.

Now, let's not, pretend Joseph, is a fool here. As we said, Joseph already, has some idea, what's going on, or else he wouldn't, be talking about the divorce. But now, he's being told by God, no, you're going to, bring her home anyway.

And that still, has implications, for what we're going, to do next. Because, what's conceived in her, is of the Holy Spirit. You still have a role, to play. You still have things, to do, after this.

[36:31] So, expectations, are clearly, out the window. Completely blown up. And all this, is going on, in the context, of a real world.

Lest we forget that. Because, Joseph and Mary, lived in an occupied nation. They were dealing, with several issues, of injustice. They were dealing, with an occupying power, that was treating, the citizens, very unjustly, and unfairly.

And then, it was just still, the ongoing, real struggle, that it was, to survive, period, in the first century world. All that's going on, around them, and this is happening, in this guy's, individual life.

So, what does that tell us, about us? What, how does that speak to us, right here, right now? Because we kind of, know what happens next.

We don't have to dwell on that. But the question is, what is the lesson? What does that matter, to any of us, sitting here in 2020, thinking about, the year we have had, listening to what Joseph went through?

[37:37] I think the hard part, for us, as we sit here right now, is to think about, that idea of how, expectations are not met. That idea of how, the world just hooks, this amazing left turn, and nothing that we were expecting, seems to be going, as expected.

I think Joseph, can relate to that. But what we can learn, from Joseph, is what he does, once, God, breaks through.

Once God shows up, we see something, pretty amazing in Joseph. In verse 24, we hear this. When Joseph woke up, he did what the angel, of the Lord, commanded him, and took Mary home, as his wife.

So, whatever, we might be struggling with, however much loss, however much pain, however much frustration, however much sadness, however much anger, that we may be feeling, because the world, is not living into, our expectations, right now.

That things may have, this major turn, and we thought 2020, was going to unfold, a certain way. And we are still stuck in it. We are still tired of it. Everything, seems to still be happening.

[38:59] Every day, there's a new thing, that feels like, that's not what the plan was. But is God, trying, to break, into, your world?

What might God, be trying, to tell you, that you are struggling, to hear? That's the thing, we all have to fight with.

That's the thing, we all have some issues with, from time to time. Now, we don't always have, the luxury, of divine visitors, at night. We don't always get that.

But, however God, might be trying, to talk to you. However God, might be trying, to reach you. However God, might be trying, to break, into your world, in a new way.

The key is, once you have, heard from God. Once the message, might be coming, to you. Can we follow, this amazing example, of faith, we see in Joseph?

[40:10] Because, that's the hard part. Because, God doesn't have, any problem, communicating with us. I want to say that again, God doesn't have, any problem, communicating with us, as we sit here, and go, well I don't know, that I've gotten, any messages.

My bet, is that's not a God thing, that's an us thing. God has no problem, speaking clearly. It's us understanding, that's the issue. And if we really, want to hear from God, we have to really, want to hear from God.

Most of us, in our own way, don't. We kind of have, our own plans. We have our own expectations. And God may be saying, I got something, bigger in mind.

I can see something, happening that you can't see. There's a huge plan, that you're a part of. And I got big hopes for you. The question is, will you hear, what God is telling you?

And once you've heard it, because the hearing is one thing, once you've heard it, can we say yes to? Now that's one big lesson.

[41:28] But what does that teach us about love? Because our theme today, is about love. I think the thing, that love, brings to this, is the ability, to trust God, when God has spoken.

Because the thing, that we know for sure, no matter where you've been, no matter how you've experienced this year, or all the years prior to it, the thing that our lives, are a walking testament to, is the fact that, we are beloved children of God.

One thing that we can all, stake our hopes on, one thing we can all, stake our lives on, one thing that we know for sure, is that we are loved, by God.

And even when our expectations, are not met, even when life, goes in a direction, that is completely unplanned. One thing we know for sure, is that we, are loved, by God.

And if, we know that, if we, trust that, if we have lived, in it, for however many years, we have lived in it, then, even when life, hooks these terms, even when things, do not go, as planned, even when our hearts, are broken, because things feel, so off, and so weird, we can trust, that if God, comes to us, and says, don't be afraid, I have a plan, we can trust, that, because love, may not look, like what we expect, see Joseph, had all these plans, and love, seriously, didn't look like, what he was expecting, but he ended up, with the family, that he had been dreaming, he ended up, with a wife, that he had been, looking forward to, and he, got to be a part, of the greatest story, ever told, which is much more, than he was ever, expecting, but that's because,

God has a plan, whether he could, see it or not, but he knew, God loved him, and he loved God, enough to say yes, so no matter, how we feel today, no matter, how much of a struggle, 2020 has been to you, no matter, how much loss, pain, and frustration, you may have felt, if you know, you are a beloved, child of God, you can trust, that no matter, what tomorrow holds, the story, will be fine, amen, and amen, almighty and gracious God, we thank you, that you show us, these things, that the love, comes to us, so much bigger, and so much more powerfully, than we can ever expect, Lord, we bring, all these expectations, to the table, sometimes we hold, so tightly, to what we think, it's supposed to look like, we miss, what can be, because you, are in control,

Lord, no matter how you, are trying to break through, into our lives right now, give us eyes to see, and ears to hear, give us hearts, to love you in return, to love you enough, to go, wherever you are leading us to, because your story, your vision, your hope, your plan, is always better than ours, no matter, no matter, what it feels like to us, no matter, what it looks like to us, let us, know that love, in the most real, of ways, you have already, made it so real, in the life of Jesus, your amazing gift, to us, and all the world, you've made it real, in our lives, even though, this has been, such a difficult season, we know, and our lives, are still walking, testaments, to the fact, that we are beloved, children, of God, so Lord, let us hear, let us see, and let us love, so that, those who don't know, will come to know, in the name of Jesus, the Christ, we pray,

Amen. God knew, that no matter, the preacher, the prayer, the speaker, that we wouldn't, always remember, and so we come, to the sacrament, of communion, to be reminded, again, and again, of that love, would you join me, the Lord be with you, and also with you, lift up your hearts, lift up your hearts, let us give thanks, to the Lord our God, it is right, and a good, and a joyful thing, always and everywhere, to raise our voices, with you, tuning ourselves, to you creator, of heaven and earth, you filled, the night of creation, with music, and light, setting into motion, the rhythms, of sunrise, and sunset, sound, and silence, you formed, within us, your love song, and breathed, into us, the very breath, of life, sometimes, our voices, are choked, and we cannot, find our melody, but you keep, the baseline humming, waiting, for us to rejoin, the chorus, you show up, in the worst of times, offering us, the way to freedom, in you, your voice, breaks through, in prophets, whose songs, wake us up, to the kingdom, you desire, and so, with your people, on earth, and all the company, of heaven, we praise your name, and join, their unending hymn, holy, holy, holy Lord,

God of power, and might, heaven, and earth, are full, of your glory, Hosanna, in the highest, blessed, is he, who comes, in the name, of the Lord, Hosanna, in the highest, holy, are you, and blessed, is your son, Jesus Christ, breaking, forth, into light, from the blessed, darkness, of a womb, he brought, light, that illumined, a path, so we could, see our way, to beloved community, your spirit, anointed him, to raise his voice, preach good news, to the poor, proclaim release, to the captives, and recovering, of sight, to the blind, to set at liberty, those who are oppressed, and to announce, that the time, had come, when you would, save your people, you healed the sick, fed the hungry, and ate with sinners, and invited us, to do the same, born into a world, of suffering, he suffered, born into a world, of senseless death, he died, born into a world, that needed hope, he rose, delivering us, and proclaiming, light, and life, triumph, for the living, and the dead, when the Lord, of Jesus ascended, he promised, to be with us, always, in the power, of your word, and holy spirit, holy savior, lighting our way, on the night, in which, he gave himself up, for us, he took bread, gave thanks to you, and broke the bread, gave it to his disciples, and said, take, eat, this is my body, which is given for you, do this, in remembrance of me, and the supper, was over, he took the cup, gave thanks to you, and gave it to his disciples, and said, drink from this, all of you, this is my blood, of the new covenant, poured out for you, and for many, for the forgiveness, of sins, and so do this, as often, as you drink it, in remembrance, of me, and so, in remembrance, of your mighty acts, in Jesus Christ, we offer ourselves, as a holy, and living sacrifice, in union, with Christ's offering, for us, as we proclaim, the mystery of faith,

Christ has died, Christ is risen, Christ will come again, pour out your holy spirit, on us gathered here, and on these gifts, of bread and cup, make them be for us, your love, and light, so that our hearts, may be opened in service, to you, and to the world, by your spirit, make us one with Christ, one with each other, and one in ministry, to all the world, mix our voices, in harmony, with each other, until we sit, at the same table, until we sit, at the same table, and sing, and the same choir, in your kingdom, on earth, as it is in heaven, through your son, Jesus Christ, with the Holy Spirit, and your holy church, all honor, and glory, is yours, almighty God, now, and forever, amen, and let us join together, in the prayer, that Jesus taught, our father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name, thy kingdom come, thy will be done, on earth, as it is in heaven, give us this day, our daily bread, and forgive us, our trespasses, as we forgive, those who trespass, against us, and lead us, not to temptation, but deliver us, from evil, for thine, is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, forever, amen, in a time, when there is so much, we cannot do, we are so grateful, that we can, receive this gift, and so,

I invite you, to remove your masks, briefly, and open the side, that has, the cracker in it, the body of Christ, broken for you, the blood of Christ, shed for you, I invite you, to put your masks, back on, and take your cups, with you, when you leave, and put them, in one of the gray, trash cans, we go, this place, as people, who have been fed, in the greatest love, there ever was, amen, Piano gets lost, Ar XL,LE

O little town of Bethlehem, I'll still be sleeping high.

Above thy deep and dreamless sleep, the silent stars go by. Let in thy dark streets shine the everlasting light.

The hopes and fears of all the years are end in thee tonight.

For Christ is born of Mary and gathered all above. While mortals sleep, the angels keep their watch of wandering love.

[54:44] All morning stars together proclaim the holy birth.

And praises sing to God the King and peace to all on earth. How silently, how silently, the wondrous gift is given.

Though God imparts to human hearts the blessings of His hand. No we may hear His coming, but in this world of sin.

Where meek souls will receive Him still, the dear Christ enters in.

Amen.

[56:07] So as beloved children of God, we go into the world. No matter what the world holds, no matter what our expectations may be, we can trust that we are beloved children of God.

And the coming of Christ is one way we know the depth, the totality, the amazing nature of our God's love for us.

Go with that in your hearts and let it make a difference in how you live and love each other. Now in the name of God, our creator and king, in the name of Jesus Christ, our Lord and our savior, and in the name of the Holy Spirit, our counselor and our sustainer, may God bless us now as we leave to love and serve God, all God's children.

Amen. Thank you. Amen. Amen. Amen.

Amen. Amen.

[57:33] Thank you.

Thank you.

Thank you.

Thank you.

Thank you.