

## THE HOPE OF ADVENT, PART 3



### THE LOVE OF MY LIFE

**“I don’t remember the words exactly,  
but I do remember the way that I felt when we were together.”**

**FAITH, HOPE AND LOVE ABIDE, ... BUT THE GREATEST OF THESE IS LOVE**

*Scripture:*

**1 Corinthians 13**

1. If I speak in the tongues of humans and of angels, but have not love, I am a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal.
2. And if I have prophetic powers, and understand all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have all faith, so as to remove mountains, but have not love, I am nothing.
3. If I give away all I have, and if I deliver my body to be burned, but have not love, I gain nothing.
4. Love is patient and kind; love is not jealous or boastful;
5. it is not arrogant or rude. Love does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful;
6. it does not rejoice at wrong, but rejoices in the right.
7. Love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things.
8. Love never ends; as for prophecies, they will pass away; as for tongues, they will cease; as for knowledge, it will pass away.
9. For our knowledge is imperfect and our prophecy is imperfect;
10. but when the perfect comes, the imperfect will pass away.
11. When I was a child, I spoke like a child, I thought like a child, I reasoned like a child; when I became a man, I gave up childish ways.
12. For now we see in a mirror dimly, but then face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall understand fully, even as I have been fully understood.
13. So faith, hope, love abide, these three; but the greatest of these is love.



### THE LOVE OF MY LIFE

“I don’t remember the words exactly, but I do remember the way that I felt when we were together.

Two weeks ago we lit a candle to begin the season, and we remembered that Advent begins with hope.

Last week, Charlie Brown reminded us of the true meaning of Christmas, just as he has done for the last forty-one years. “Peace on earth” is the message. That is peace that begins within ourselves, extends to our intimate friends, our distant friends, the animals, earth, and ideas we embrace. Hope

leads to peace.

Next year, wouldn’t it be fun to invite Charlie Brown back and invite Jean Schulz to join us, and we will thank her for the many years that Charlie Brown reminded our children that the message of Christmas can still be found if we look in the right places.

Today, part 3. “Love is the practice of peace.” Some people are easy to love. Others are more difficult. However, the very heart of our faith is found in a scripture many of us memorized long ago that says God sent us a Savior, not a judge, when Christ was born.

**Say it with me.** *For God so loved the world that God gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life. For God sent the Son into the world, not to condemn the world, but that the world might be saved through him.*

### JOHN 3:16

There is no verse in the Bible more powerful than these forty-six words. Think about them:

**God** – the greatest name we can give to the unnamed creator of life and energy and love and the world in which we live.

**So loved** – the greatest expression of care.

**The world** – the greatest number. Today we might even say the cosmos.

**That God gave** – giving is the greatest measure of human generosity.

**His only begotten Son** – his greatest treasure.

**That whosoever** – the greatest inclusiveness. Not just one group, but every group.

**Believeth in him** – belief is the basic act of affirmation that proceeds any action we might take based upon belief.

**Should not perish** – the greatest loss we can imagine.

**But have abundant life** – loss is replaced by the greatest human hope that love will never die.

**The Savior came not to condemn the world** – oh no.

**But that the world might be saved through him** – the greatest imaginable reward.

**God has given us a savior, not a judge.**

### WHY IS A SAVIOR SO HARD FOR US TO ACCEPT?

- Why do we turn the gift of the savior into the human boundaries that separate people?
- How do we move from the unconditional love of the savior to some list of afflictions that separate us from each other?
- Why do we believe that the savior forgives our sins while condemning the sins that we observe in others?

He doesn't. Those are not the words of Jesus. They are not the teachings of Advent.

### THE FAMILY SUPPORT CENTER

Thursday, I spent the morning at the Catholic Charities' Family Support Center. It's over by the Santa Rosa Mall, and our church has supported their work for many years.

The Family Support Center is the place where the inclusive power of love is practiced. No one asks whether or not you are worthy to be there. It is just assumed that there must be some reason and a need. There is no test of piety, no list of unforgivable sins, which is required to receive the services of the Family Support Center.

So the Center provides for basic human needs. You can wash your clothing and wash your body; you can get mail and telephone messages; you can get the support you need to find a job, and then, if you are lucky, a place of your own to live.

The Family Support Center practices what the church of the first century preached. You are welcome here, because God has sent us a savior, not a judge.

**I'd like to be a church like that. Would you?**

I toured rooms that contained two sets of bunk beds and yet are smaller than the cry room at the back of the sanctuary. Nothing fancy, but it is warm and dry. I saw what used to be the preschool, but is no more. Wouldn't it be great to be able to say that we have a Pastor's Scholarship Fund for your kids, and to be able to bring a child or two over to our own preschool? (Please form a line after worship and tell me you are ready to make that happen.)

### RECOGNIZED

I want to tell you about something that made me uncomfortable. When we were leaving the used clothing room, I got recognized.

"Hey, I know you," someone said to me. "You are from Church of the Roses, aren't you?"

I had to confess.

Maybe it wasn't me that got recognized, it was our church. Church of the Roses has a reputation in the community.

People know that we give mission money to Catholic Charities. They know we provide space for Alcoholics Anonymous, and the word is out that we raise money and labor for Habitat for Humanity.

That's the church I want to be part of. Everyone

has a reputation. How about if our reputation was that we believe that God sent us a savior not a judge? And the peace of the savior lifts our thinking to acts of love and inclusiveness – like the Family Support Center.

### **THE SENIOR CENTER**

Then I went to the Senior Center and had senior lunch. And a man who had been a minister spoke to me. He seemed to know me, too. He told me that he had been forced to leave the ministry, and it broke his heart. His marriage ended with a divorce. His church had said there was no place for him with them anymore because he was divorced. I asked him if that could really happen, or was it really something else. He said it could really happen, and it did.

The Senior Center is another of those places where they will accept you for what you are and help you, and don't ask questions. I want to encourage places like that. Do you think we would dare be a church like that, where we were truly multicultural? I don't want to add to the level of prejudice in the community. I believe that God sent us a savior, not a judge. And I think that is one of the lessons that Advent teaches us.

**Jesus didn't visit the theologians first, I was reminded during choir rehearsal yesterday.**

**He didn't visit the affluent first.**

**The first people at the manger were the shepherds.**

If anyone should understand the way in which a good shepherd loves every sheep in the flock, it is the good shepherd. And that is who Jesus said he was.

### **THE MAN WHO ARGUED WITH GOD**

I want to tell you about one more person I met on Thursday. It was a man who said he hadn't been to church in a long time because he got into an argument with God. He said his life had been surrounded by people who don't believe in God, but he was ready to give God a second chance.

He said he had prayed to God during a difficult time in his life and felt that God had not answered his prayers to his satisfaction, and so he spent most of his life denying that a God who would send a savior, not a judge, could even exist.

I just listened. And then he said, "Tell me about the people in your church."

I said, "I think we have people at Church of the Roses who feel just like you do. We have people in our church who have been wrestling with God for years. But they understand that wrestling with God is better than withdrawing from life and never caring about spiritual things. Spiritual things are worth wrestling for."

"Do you think a person with doubts, like me, would be welcome at your church?" he asked. I told him I would be willing to ask.

So I'm asking today.

A man, who had been in an argument with God for most of his life, had experienced something that he could not handle alone. I don't really know what it was. But he said he might be willing to give God a second chance, and he prayed that God would not judge him too harshly for the things he had done in his life.

Would he be welcome here? Is your answer yes or no?

We got along pretty well, and he ended up by saying he might drop by some day. So if you see that man, will you let me know? Wouldn't it be great to have the reputation as the church people go to when they were ready to give God a second chance?

### **I want to be that kind of church.**

#### **MATTHEW - Chapter 9**

9. As Jesus passed on from there, he saw a man called Matthew sitting at the tax office; and he said to him, "Follow me." And he rose and followed him.
10. And as he sat at table in the house, behold, many tax collectors and sinners came and sat down with Jesus and his disciples.
11. And when the Pharisees saw this, they said to his disciples, "Why does your teacher eat with tax collectors and sinners?"
12. But when he heard it, he said, "Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick.
13. Go and learn what this means, 'I desire mercy, and not sacrifice.' For I came not to call the righteous, but sinners."

### **I want to be that kind of church**

## MATTHEW - Chapter 25

34. Then the King will say to those at his right hand, 'Come, O blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world;
35. for I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me,
36. I was naked and you clothed me, I was sick and you visited me, I was in prison and you came to me.'
37. Then the righteous will answer him, 'Lord, when did we see thee hungry and feed thee, or thirsty and give thee drink?
38. And when did we see thee a stranger and welcome thee, or naked and clothe thee?
39. And when did we see thee sick or in prison and visit thee?'
40. And the King will answer them, (You know.) 'Truly, I say to you, as you did it to one of the least of these my brethren, you did it to me.'

### **I want to be that kind of church.**

It is easy to love when you are beautiful, when life is beautiful and you are full of health and full of money and the sun is shining.

And if that is the world you live in, I say enjoy it. And be grateful.

But that is not the life that I have known.

I remember lying in the hospital twelve years ago with tubes sticking out of everywhere. I was frightened that I might not be able to walk again, and I was cranky and I needed a bath.

And someone loved me even when I was ugly and angry, and when I wasn't in a mood to give much love back in return...

### **I want to be that kind of church.**

#### **SO WHAT DOES GOD WANT OF YOU?**

God wants to get your attention. God wants enough of you so that you have to make some kind of sacrifice in your life because of your faith. God wants a little more than is comfortable, more than is easy, more than what you can spare without noticing it.

God sent us a savior, not a judge in hopes that:  
We would listen more than we speak;  
That we would diagnose before we prescribe;  
That we interpret before we expound;  
That we would seek to understand before we demanded to be understood;  
So that we would be a savior and not a judge.

### **I want to be that kind of church.**

"A person who has never made a mistake has never tried anything new." – Albert Einstein

**I want to be that kind of church where we try to do new things.**

"When one door of happiness closes, another opens; but often we look so long at the closed door that we do not see the one which has been opened for us." – Helen Keller

**I want to be that kind of church where we open doors, rather than staring at closed ones.**

**Peace leads to love.**

**And the greatest statement of love is our scripture today, about the nature of God's own love: Say it with me. *For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life. For God sent the Son into the world, not to condemn the world, but that the world might be saved through him.***

### **I want to be that kind of church.**



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