

Sermon for Advent 4C

Love

Over the past four weeks we've been following our advent themes as preaching themes. Two things of note about that, this week.

The first is that love gets many more mentions in Scripture than the other themes of hope, joy and peace.

The second—from a sermon point of view—is that almost every week the sermon ends up being about love in one way or another.

So what else could possibly be said that is new?

There are a few things about the love of Christ and it is always good to hear again. In doing so may we hear of God's love working in us in a new and refreshing way which revitalizes us and our faith.

The first thing to hear is that when it comes to love, Jesus is more into actions than words.

Certainly he gives us his love. The following text tells us that: "As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you." John 15:9 (NIV)

By the way, it also tells us its source – God.

But mostly Jesus' love is action. Instead of repeatedly telling us he loves us he repeatedly does things that show he does.

The sort of actions I'm thinking about are his:

- compassionate healing;
- his comfort for those who mourn;
- his friendship with tax-collectors and other outcasts of the day;
- his heart break over human disobedience; and
- his teaching about God's acceptance of the repentant sinner.

All of them are important. But that heartbreak over our disobedience on one hand and his acceptance of the repentant sinner on the other is essential to emphasise because they show the heart of Jesus. For all people, including us.

We see his heartbreak over human disobedience in this text from Luke 19: "As he approached Jerusalem and saw the city, he *wept*

over it and said, “If you, even you, had only known on this day what would bring you peace—but now it is hidden from your eyes.” (Luke 19:41–42)

Jesus wept because it was never meant to be like this. God was always supposed to dwell with his people – not be separated. The love of Christ for us is evident in the way he wept.

But we see the acceptance of the repentant sinner in Luke 15— words of comfort indeed:

So [the prodigal son] got up and went to his father. But while he was still a long way off, his father saw him and was filled with compassion for him; he ran to his son, threw his arms around him and kissed him.” (Luke 15:20)

Such is the love of Christ that our sin killed him but he had to draw near to us – and draw us near to him – regardless.

What Scripture then does is point to all these things being a demonstration of God’s love for us.

God’s love is not something abstract.

Something is abstract when it deals with ideas... and doesn't have a physical or concrete existence.

God’s love it is not like that. It is revealed in the person of Jesus Christ. But not *just* his flesh and bones. But in *what he did*.

This verse from 1 John puts it well: “This is how God showed his love among us: He sent his one and only Son into the world that we might live through him. This is love: not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins” (1 John 4:9–10)

You can sum all that up by saying two main things about Jesus’ love:

- it's about doing – so its verb – not a noun...
- and about doing for others, not self... therefore it's about service.

So ‘Doing by service’.

This text puts it aptly: “For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.” (Mark 10:45) Now most of you know much of that. I’ve deliberately included it today so you can receive it with joy afresh.

Jesus served us.

Yes us—us here!

The son of God.

From heaven!

He served you and me.

But the next thing is how we make his love our own. Or ‘fill our love tank’ if I can borrow a popular phrase today.

Where does your love tank get filled with God’s love? We need to view his love through the love of his church.

For example Ephesians 5:25 tells us: ‘Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her...’

So the love you receive from Christ is because you are part of Christ’s church.

Which is his body.

We like to be individuals and zoom in our personal receipt of Christ’s love. “My relationship with God”, we say.

Certainly salvation is personal. To some extent Christianity has soaked up from society an infatuation with the individual. Yet it is always important for us to know that God’s love for us comes to us as we dwell in his body the church.

Our faith exists because God worked through others to incorporate us into the Communion of saints—his body—his church of all times and places.

That doesn’t mean we only ever do *our own* bible study or prayer. But it does mean that we always see our point of reference as being within the body of Christ.

The final thing I want to address is what fills our love tank. The thing that then fires us up in love.

It is Christ (of course).

I’d like to think I can have my own source of love. In fact, be responsible for it being filled all the time. For the Christian though it is Christ who fills our love tank. In 2 Corinthians 5 Paul says: For Christ’s love compels us, because we are convinced that one died for all, and therefore all died. And he died for all, that those who live

should no longer live for themselves but for him who died for them and was raised again.” (2 Corinthians 5:14–15)

We are compelled by his love. With the Holy Spirit as our teacher, we have grasped the gospel of his life, death and resurrection for us. And we therefore get the fuel we need to live not for ourselves, but for God.

If you are like me you'll have trouble doing that from time to time. At times we think only about ourselves; putting ourselves first. Not thinking about Christ and his sacrifice. Not tapping into his power through meditating on his word and seeking him in prayer.

Now sometimes we just get tired. That loving thing ...we don't have the energy for. God knows that, and so do many of the loving people he has put in my life.

Yet: Christ's love compels us, because we are convinced that one died for all, and therefore all died.

In those unloving times we need to come back to the source of our love. Don't let the love tank get a blockage in its opening... don't let it calcify or rust over. Instead reset your thinking with these words: *Christ's love compels us, because we are convinced that one died for all, and therefore all died.*

So... in summary... God's love is different to our love. It acts! Indeed, it was God who first loved, and still loves. And it has gone after us and brought us into his body the church. A church where Christ eagerly rejoices like that father of the lost son when we come back. And because of his action grounded in history through the cross of Calvary it compels us to keep loving in what we do, say and think. For this we thank, praise, serve, and obey him. Amen.