

## **Weekly Study of Sunday's Message.**

**December 18, 2022 "Advent: You will need LOVE."**

### **I Intro.**

Welcome to the weekly devotional that gives you some specific things to work through from the message Sunday. Whether you were able to participate in this service or not, this devotion is free-standing. And you can use it to help you dig deeper into your own spiritual walk. We're in the season of Advent and well into December. Our children's program is thriving and we're still tweaking ways to love on them well. We're also looking at rebooting our student ministry. We also have many ways you can plug into life at NCC. You can find all that through our website, app, and social media sites. We're encouraged by your love and presence when you gather with us. A great group of familiar and new faces join us each Sunday. If you join us online, we appreciate your presence. We are 100% committed to our virtual attenders. We are your church family, and if there is anything you need, prayer, ideas or suggestions, please pass them our way. We know the future is still uncertain, but we are committed to making our virtual congregation as central to NCC as our in person group.

### **II Recap.**

It's our fourth Sunday of Advent. A reminder, Advent is an ancient practice built into an annual church calendar that walks people through different emphases during the year. The first week we talked about hope, and how boldness can grow a real, meaningful hope within us. The second week we talked about peace. And that in order to experience the peace Jesus talked about we had to be willing to accept some truths of life. And last week our guest Byron helped us understand joy. That promised view and way to live life, that can only come from a daily, committed relationship towards Jesus. Which is what Advent is all about...expectantly waiting. Today we hit the final theme of four- Love.

### **III Sunday.**

Okay...it ALL ends here. Except for the Christmas Eve service...which will focus on Christ. We've hit hope, peace, joy, and now we look at a scriptural understanding and practice of love. Love, the foundation of our relationship with Jesus, what covers all our imperfections, and the root, the source, the starting point for what it means to experience the coming of Christ in a way that brings all of the promised things to us. I know it sounds like we're overplaying the importance of love as it relates to the four themes of Advent. So, let's talk about love.

**This seems so easy but, what does love mean to you?**

**How does a scriptural understanding of love get watered down?**

**What helps you stay centered on what you believe love should mean?**

Our scripture is found near the end of the ministry of Jesus, but encapsulates the fullness of what love really means. Read **John 15:9-17**, and we'll hit some really important ideas about love.

**What jumped out to you about this passage?**

**What did you pull from it about what love is?**

**This may be a stretch, but do you see any ways this teaching on love can connect with the other three themes of Advent; hope, peace, and joy?**

There are two phrases we want to land on from this passage.

**1. “Have loved”.** Usually “have loved” comes with a specific point in time. “I have loved you ever since...I saw you, I heard your story, that one date.” This “have loved” has no starting point. It IS the starting point. It is the; source, the first mover, beginning, root, foundation. Everything Jesus says after this is born out of, pours from, this first “have loved” **So, what do we do when we find the beginning source of everything?** This leads us to our second word.

**2. “Remain”.** The Message Bible translates “remain” as; “make yourself at home.” Connect with that. “Remain” is to; relax, unwind, that safety feeling you get when you arrive home. **What does it feel like, what are you like, when you make yourself at home?** I don’t have to be something I’m not. Allows you to rest, reside, just as you are. This is the world, atmosphere, and environment that love creates. Remaining, abiding, staying close, not leaving or changing. Also means; to possess a particular quality or fulfill a particular role. She ‘remained’ loyal all through the ordeal. Remain is also- endure, last, persist. In spite of everything going on around me, I’m fighting against. REMAIN!! Because I have found, experiencing true love, I am able to keep going...no matter what.

This kind of love fuels hope, brings peace, and grows joy. This kind of love changes the nature of relationships, and is what makes this time of year so special. So how do we grow this kind of love?

**1. Love only grows in closeness.** It moves into the neighborhood, and makes others feel at home. It not only grows out of proximity but it desires, craves, cultivates closeness. Jesus is sharing the love he received. Want to experience love this year...move towards the love of God, and others.

**2. Love is sacrificial. It calls us to surrender ourselves.** Our society does not reward or encourage selflessness. This kind of love asks what you would be willing to give up for the other. Centered on acting in a way that benefits the other. “**There is no greater love than to lay down one’s life for one’s friends.**” **Do other people experience that love when you tell them you love them?** Love elevates the other. Want to experience love this year...make your focus the welfare of others.

**3. Love grows in equality.** Love can’t be from a charity, or wrapped up with expectations. Love cannot be from above, distant, and disengaged. Love moves into the neighborhood, gets dirty, and considers the other, no matter what’s happening in their life, as a brother or sister. “**I no longer call you slaves, because a master doesn’t confide in his slaves. Now you are my friends, since I have told you everything the Father told me. You didn’t choose me. I chose you.**” Love removes, obliterates walls, barriers, structures that divide...religion. Want to experience love this year...build love on the belief that everyone is a friend.

**4. Love compels us to move towards.** THIS is the central, foundational, message of Christmas. The incarnation. Word became flesh. The Message; “*moved into the neighborhood.*” **This is my commandment: Love each other in the same way I have loved you.** Combined with “remain”, this love creates a place that lets others know they are loved, and there is flourishing in this love. “*Moved into the neighborhood and made yourself at home.*” This is what love looks like. Want to experience love this year...move towards those who are not in your circle.

#### **IV Challenge.**

No lengthy conclusion. It seems pretty obvious. **In what way can you grow love this Advent season to do each of the above in a way that reflects the love Jesus has for us?**