

Weekly Study of Sunday's Message.

December 17, 2023. "Advent: The Promise of Love."

I Intro.

We're one week out from Christmas. Things will start to wind down a bit before we pick back up at the beginning of next year. Stay connected to keep informed. We hope you are fed and ministered to by NCC, and that you can be an essential part of us moving forward. We have many ways you can plug into life at NCC. You can find all those through our website, app, and social media sites. Our app is the best way to livestream our services, but you can also livestream on FaceBook and YouTube. You can revisit past services, sign up for events and even give. We're encouraged by your presence when you gather with us. New and familiar faces join us every 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, or anything else, please let us know. This is our weekly devotional that gives you some specific things to work through from Sunday's message. Whether you were able to participate in this service or not, this devotion is free-standing. You can use it to help you dig deeper into your own spiritual walk. We hope you find this tool helpful on your spiritual journey.

II Recap.

It's the fourth Sunday of Advent. Our journey towards Christmas. We're nearly there. Advent is not actually a celebration of Christmas, but a time of waiting expectantly for the coming of the Christ. This can be a weird season for us...and that's okay. This time of year we're so focused on gifts, planning gatherings, thinking about what our Christmas will look like, we don't think about it also being a season of expectation. We all know Christmas is about Jesus. But everything gets all mashed together. We just want a month of Christmas, everything Christmas all the time. We forget what it was like for the people who lived at the time of the birth of Jesus. They had been promised a savior, a messiah, who would come and free them from captivity. But it involved waiting. And NOBODY waits well. Advent is a time for us to learn to wait well. To live in expectation for the coming of the Christ. It's in this time of waiting, we have our character built by living for the promise of hope, joy, peace, and love. The first week we celebrated the promise of hope and we talked about what promise meant. The second week we talked about joy and how it's grown in connecting with God. The third week we talked about peace, and how peace is born out of the work of justice and righteousness. Today we talk about love and ground that understanding in the work of love in scripture.

III Scripture.

This is it!! The final Sunday a.m. service of the year. And we land on probably one of the most complicated words in the entire Advent universe...LOVE. I'm going to fight sliding into the examples of how meaningless the word love has become. We don't need the; tacos, dogs, our pets, as examples to show us that when love means everything, it also means nothing. So, we'll try to do a little unpacking of the word love. But first...questions.

What does love mean to you?

Where do you believe we get love wrong? What do you think causes us to get love wrong?

We used three scriptures Sunday. One, to define what love looks like in action. And the other two scriptures show us the real truth, and the heart, of what love from God looks like. So, read the two passages **1 Corinthians 13:1-7. Isaiah 54:9-10. Hosea 14:4.**

What jumped out to you from these three passages?

How would you define love? And what makes this kind of love more powerful?

Going with our underlying understanding of love, where do you see reconciliation as a part of love?

The 1 Corinthians passage tells us this. Love only exists in relationship. And being committed through all the struggles and hard things about relationships. It takes these specific things to make a relationship work. You cannot love unless you are navigating the ins and outs of nurturing and growing a relationship. Corinthians seems to say, love ONLY exists in the work of doing the hard things that arise in relationships. Real life things that challenge our ability to actually love each other. Love requires us to do those hard things mentioned. Which means; **Love...is the continual work of reconciliation**. Working through the challenges and difficulties relationships encounter, continually doing the work of healing and mending breaks and tears in these relationships. And that is at the heart of the story of the coming of the Christ.

Where do you believe are your strength areas in the 1 Corinthians description of love, and where are areas you just know you struggle in?

Let's look at the Isaiah and Hosea passages. If reconciliation is how love is practiced and lived out, then what does that kind of love look like from God? Then love for each other. If love is from God. And we are to love the way God loves. Then our practice of love has to look like how God practices love. Love is faithful, and never broken. This doesn't mean we should never end a relationship. There are some relationships in which the people simply have to part ways. We know all too well there are a lot of tough relationships and situations that call for a different path. There are times the MOST loving thing to do is to end a relationship. Reconciliation does not always mean restoration. But there is work to be done first in trying to reconcile (not necessarily to restore) that gives us peace when we do have to part ways. Reconciliation, when appropriate and possible, is the wiser first choice. Love never gives up and it never fails. There is a meaty practice to love working through difficult times, that forces us to deal with our own stuff, to be honest with ourselves, and then stretches us outside of our human fleshy reactions to difficulties and problems.

Let's have a real conversation. When have you had a time you just couldn't reconcile a broken or strained relationship? What happened? AND, when was the time you were able to do the hard, grind it out, work of reconciling and restoring a relationship? What happened?

These verses are about the reconciling nature at the heart of real love. The desire for real love, moves us to do the work of reconciliation. Again reconciliation does not always mean restoration. Sometimes it is better and wiser to walk away. The work of reconciliation grows a kind of love that helps navigate the difficulties and struggles of being in a relationship.

IV Challenge.

So, we've finished Advent. Talked about the type of love that is at the heart of the story of the coming of the Christ. Christmas is a week away. What do we do now? We make sure we're ready for the incarnate Christ. And we do the work of carving out space, a place holder, for the promises of Hope, Joy, Peace, and Love.

What can and will you do to do the work, and create space, for these promises of Advent?