

Sunday, December 21, 2025 - Advent Week 4: THE "WHOEVERS" THAT GOD LOVES – Pastor John Henry Raskin

Advent is a season of anticipation, reflection, and preparation for the celebration of Jesus' birth and His promised return. In previous weeks, we focused on Hope, Peace, and Joy. This final week centers on Love—God's love for us, our love for God, and how we are called to love others.

- **John 3:16**
"For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life."
- **1 John 3:1**
"Behold what manner of love the Father has bestowed on us, that we should be called children of God!"
- **John 3:17**
"For God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world through Him might be saved."
- **1 John 2:15-17**
"Do not love the world or the things in the world... the world is passing away, and the lust of it; but he who does the will of God abides forever."
- **Exodus 34:6-7**
The Lord, the Lord God, merciful and gracious, longsuffering, and abounding in goodness and truth, keeping mercy for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin, by no means clearing the guilty.
- **Luke 1:46-53 (The Magnificat)**
"My soul magnifies the Lord... He has put down the mighty from their thrones and exalted the lowly. He has filled the hungry with good things, and the rich He has sent away empty."
- **1 John 4:21**
"And this commandment we have from Him: that he who loves God must love his brother also."
- **Matthew 25:40**
"Assuredly, I say to you, inasmuch as you did it to one of the least of these My brethren, you did it to Me."

Main Points

- **God's Love Is for "Whoever" Believes:**
God's love is offered to all, but it is received by those who believe and seek Him. The "whoever" are those who respond to God's invitation.
- **Love Is a Choice:**
Free will means some choose darkness over light. True love for God means turning away from selfish desires and loving others as Jesus loves us.
- **God's Character:**
God is merciful, gracious, and just. Salvation is a free gift, but it requires repentance and recognition of our need for a Savior.
- **Mary's Song (Magnificat):**
The birth of Jesus signals a new Kingdom where love, justice, and mercy overturn worldly power. This message has challenged the powerful throughout history.
- **Our Role:**
As recipients of God's love, we are called to love our neighbors, share the good news, and serve others selflessly.

Let us praise God with whole hearts as we await Christ's return, daring to love like Jesus and share His light with the world.

ADVENT WEEK 4: THE WHOEVERS THAT GOD LOVES

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

For the last several weeks we have been exploring the wonders of Advent, the season that anticipates Christmas.

In the Old as well as New Testaments, we have looked at scriptures that, hopefully, have made the story of God's love for humanity come alive for us.

The Old Testament Prophets, Elizabeth and her husband Zacharias, John the Baptist, Mary, Joseph and the disciples all had a part in this story.

My intention was to make it clear to my beloved church family that we also have a part in this story.

God's continuing story.

The first three weeks of Advent we focused on Hope, Peace and Joy respectively.

Today is the last week of Advent and as such, is the completion of our waiting for the celebration of Christmas, the birth of Jesus Messiah, when we celebrate the arrival on earth of the Son of the Trinity, God Himself, who took on the flesh of a helpless babe, and was born to us, a Savior with a job to do.

His birth resounded with hope and the Herald Angels sang of Peace on earth, goodwill toward men and joy to the world.

This last Sunday of Advent is also, appropriately, the beginning of something.

The reflection and preparation for the return of the Son of God in power and glory.

Appropriately, today, our Advent message is Love.

...and since we have been exploring Advent as a time of reflection and preparation, a time for looking back and looking forward, we will talk today about God's love for us, and also our love for God and what that looks like to Him.

Of course, you are all familiar with one of the most quoted of the New Testament scriptures and so please repeat it with me.

John 3:16

16 For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life.

But wait... does God really love the world?

After all, it was John, the beloved disciple who knew Jesus as a friend and who wrote this scripture who said to us "Love not the world".

I think today is a good day to drill down on what God's Love and the world really mean to God and to us.

However, it's complex...

The reason it's complex is because of the "whoever" in John 3:16.

This same disciple, John the beloved, unravels this complexity a bit for us in his first letter to the churches in Asia Minor.

1 John 3:1

Behold what manner of love the Father has bestowed on us, that we should be called children of God! Therefore, the world does not know us, because it did not know Him.

So, if we read John 3:16 and 1 John 3:1 together we begin to see a deep truth emerge.

God so loved “the world” that He hoped that all would choose to believe in the Son but clearly not all did, will or would.

Let's look again at **John 3:16**.

Let's focus for a moment on the word, “whoever” in this scripture.

“Whoever” is the very personal and specific object of God's love for whom He would send His Son to die.

“Whoever” is you and me when we believed in Jesus as Lord and continue to seek God’s Will for our lives.

God loved Humanity so much that He gave His only begotten Son and just as importantly took on human flesh Himself, so that we, the “whoever” who love Him back would be saved.

Saved from what?

It’s also a complex question, although many oversimplify it.

Many just say, “the wrath to come” or eternal damnation.

While that is true, it doesn't say enough about God's character which we believe to be love and more specifically Agape love, which is love that does not require love in return.

It's John again who gives us more clarity into this complex question of how God could so love the world and yet let us know in no uncertain terms that there was a Day of reckoning when this world would end and not well for some.

The Word from the Gospel of John continues...

John 3:17

17 For God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world through Him might be saved.

Here we see that it is truly God's desire for the entire world to be saved through the salvation offered by the Son

and yet the very next verses tell us that in His omniscient sovereignty he knows that this is not to be.

John 3:18-20

18 “He who believes in Him is not condemned; but he who does not believe is condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God.

19 And this is the condemnation, that the light has come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil. 20 For everyone practicing evil hates the light and does not come to the light, lest his deeds should be exposed.

So here we see the whole truth.

Jesus did not come into the world to condemn it but that the world through Him might be saved.

This scripture makes clear that God loved the world so much that He gave His only begotten Son however, there would be and there always have been humans who loved darkness rather than light.

This is the dark side of free will.

This is the other kind of love.

The love of self over the love of God.

The love of money. The love of power.

It is we then who condemn ourselves.

The condemned are the ones who would reject this free offer of salvation in favor of the world and all that it offers.

What does the world offer?

The beloved disciple gives us this piece of the puzzle as well and offers a warning to us all.

John said this to the early church, believers all...

1 John 2:15-17

15 Do not love the world or the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. 16 For all that is in the world—the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life—is not of the Father but is of the world. 17 And the world is passing away, and the lust of it; but he who does the will of God abides forever.

As we look at these scriptures from John together, a picture begins to emerge of what God is really looking for in the “Whoever”.

A people who are willing to repent of their preoccupation with themselves and the world's desires.

A people who live out the desire to be like Jesus and love other people like He loves humanity.

A people who will revere and reflect God's own Character as displayed by Jesus on earth and in the scriptures.

For a more complete description of God's character let's look to the Torah specifically the Book of Exodus.

This scripture occurs when Moses was about to receive the tablets of the law on Mount Sinai and God Himself describes His own character.

Exodus 34:6-7

6 And the Lord passed before him and proclaimed,

“The Lord, the Lord God, merciful and gracious, longsuffering, and abounding in goodness and truth, 7 keeping mercy for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin, by no means clearing the guilty,

So here we see that God is gracious, loving and merciful and He is also Holy and just.

One reason it's important to clarify God's character is that there are some Christians that dispute whether God's gift of salvation is truly offered to everyone or whether He created some people for salvation and some for destruction.

I maintain that there is a free offer of salvation to everyone who will receive it.

However, before anyone can receive this free gift in spirit and in truth it is imperative that they truly recognize their need for a savior and repent.

This scripture might cause you to wonder who are the guilty if God forgives iniquity, transgression and sin?

The guilty are those who refuse to repent.

Sin unacknowledged is sin unforgiven.

A sinner is saved by Grace but only if they acknowledge their need for a Savior.

God's character does not change but thanks to His Spirit, that draws human beings to Himself, our character does.

And in Christ, in a very good way.

For those who seek God will find Him in Jesus and those who follow Jesus will find the way of abundant and eternal life.

Those are the saved.

But we ask again, what are we saved from?

Clearly scripture does tell us that there will be an end to this world in fact, that the world is even now passing away.

So, there is a final destruction of the world we know, there is an eternal separation from God for those who reject the Son, and eternal rewards for those who receive and follow Him.

That is why in the process of being and becoming the "whoever" that God so loves because we believe, there is one more thing that we need to be saved from.

The other thing that we need to be saved from and are being saved from by a real relationship with Christ the Son is simply “ourselves”.

It is the very reason that God’s Spirit enters those who truly believe and follow Jesus.

The Spirit provides the desire to know Jesus and be excited about a personal relationship with Him.

The Holy Spirit provides in a true follower of Jesus an ongoing inner urging that I can only describe as the love of God that is wanting to come out of each one of us who truly believe.

It's one of the reasons why it's hard for me to accept the translations of John 3:16 that say “for God so loved the world that he gave His one and only son”

because it stands to reason that if we are children of God, in Christ, in the fullness of time, He has and will have many sons and daughters.

The truth is that He has only one begotten Son, conceived by Mary of the Holy Spirit, Jesus the Messiah, so that when we are in Him, we are also His sons and daughters.

Last week we looked at the scripture that is known as the Magnificat or the song of Mary.

It's very often used to demonstrate the love of God for mankind and the love of mankind for God on this 4th Sunday of Advent.

Let's look at it again.

Luke 1:46-53

“My soul magnifies the Lord,

47 And my spirit has rejoiced in God my Savior.

**48 For He has regarded the lowly state of His maidservant;
For behold, henceforth all generations will call me blessed.**

**49 For He who is mighty has done great things for me,
And holy is His name.**

**50 And His mercy is on those who fear Him
From generation to generation.**

**51 He has shown strength with His arm;
He has scattered the proud in the imagination of their hearts.**

**52 He has put down the mighty from their thrones,
And exalted the lowly.**

**53 He has filled the hungry with good things,
And the rich He has sent away empty.**

For purposes of focus I'm going to stop there, but here is the essence of what this scripture portrays...

Mary's response, on this fourth Sunday of Advent, really can be read as her praise toward God's love in sending a Savior and using her to do it.

But the Magnificat is also a subversive song of resistance... a manifesto, if you will, of liberation and revolution.

In it, Mary is proclaiming a New World Order.

She begins with a song of praise : "God has looked with favor upon me, a lowly servant, and from now on, all generations will call me blessed".

And then she proclaims: "God has brought down the powerful from their thrones and lifted up the lowly.

God has filled the hungry with good things, and the rich he has sent away empty.”

In coming into His Creation as the baby Jesus, God is establishing a new world order – a new Kingdom – where the mighty and powerful will be pulled down from their thrones, and where the lowly will be lifted up high, and the hungry will be filled with good things.

This will not be done by violence but with love.

This is the glorious proclamation of the advent of the upside -down Kingdom on earth.

The Kingdom where love rules and wickedness is cast down.

That’s what Mary is proclaiming in the Magnificat, and those words over the centuries have been unsettling to those in power.

The British government during its occupation of India, deemed it unlawful to sing the Magnificat in church.

Argentina, during the oppressive regime of Juan Peron, banned the Magnificat from being read aloud.

And, during the 1980’s, the corrupt Guatemalan government did the same, because it stirred up the impoverished masses.

On the Eve of Jesus’ birth, Mary’s message to the world proclaims that God loves the world so much that change is coming.

I expect that some of you may find this kind of love unsettling.

I want to assure you beloved, that this is the Gospel.

This is the good news.

This is the world which began passing away at the first Noel, and now here in 2025 we, the “whoever” that God so loved are part of this great revolution.

It is our purpose to display the character of God that we have in Christ Jesus and resist getting caught up in the world’s ideas of power and yes, even love.

Because here in 2025 some people still love darkness rather than light, because their deeds are evil.

It is our role in God’s great continuing love story to bring the light so that our neighbors will either be drawn to it

Or they will reject it, but that is God’s business, not ours.

Our job is to love our neighbors enough that we would go out of our comfort zones and share this great salvation with the passion that Jesus deserves.

Loving our neighbors as ourselves is desiring for them to have the salvation that we are so grateful to have in Christ Jesus.

To only point out their flaws and sinful behavior without giving them the opportunity to know the Jesus that you know would be to hate them.

This is what John told the churches about that.

1 John 4:21

21 And this commandment we have from Him: that he who loves God must love his brother also.

Another role that we have in this new and glorious upside-down Kingdom is to be good stewards of the gifts that we have and give them away freely.

In so doing we will glorify our King who is coming soon in Glory and Power to reward his servants.

In His own words...

Matthew 25:40

And the King will answer and say to them, ‘Assuredly, I say to you, inasmuch as you did it to one of the least of these My brethren, you did it to Me.’

Beloved, we are the “whoever” that God so loved.

Let us praise Him with a whole heart of love as we await His glorious return.

Let’s pray...