

December 20, 2020

4th Sunday in Advent - Aldersgate UMC of Butte, MT
406.782.2425 ... www.aldersgatebutte.org

Living into a More Beloved Community
Through *God's Agape Love!*
Pastor Matthias (Matt) Krier (notes to message)

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Background to scripture

Scripture Lesson: Luke 1:46b-55 (via video) <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VvrJsy7xaXY>

Message

Transforming Power of Love

In this book I hold in my hand is an illustrated book of the Love Chapter in I Corinthians 13. I will not read the scripture, but the quotes from children in one of my past churches. I asked them to answer the question: WHAT IS LOVE? Here are some of their answers:

Jessica ... "Love is when people are listening to me." Emily ... "Love is liking my brother." anonymous ... "Love is loving my sister." Allyson ... "Love is knowing when you should help someone and understanding how they feel." Ryan ... "Love is helping someone in a wheelchair." John David ... "Love is helping pick up things and not being rude." Sarah ... "Love is being kind."

Sharing this kind of love is good news in a bad news world.

The Message Bible by Eugene Peterson, puts this first verse in our scripture passage for today this way:

And Mary said,

I'm bursting with God-news;

I'm dancing the song of my Savior God.

We are living in a time with COVID cases on the rise around the country, hospitals being overwhelmed, record numbers of deaths on a daily basis, not to mention how our democracy is constantly being challenged and threatened. We need this God-news Mary is proclaiming; we need to dance the song of God in a land that is hurting for good news. Mary's song is entitled the Magnificat and it is indeed magnificent! This is the prelude to love being born into the world. Love can conquer all things such as hate and selfishness. Here are some things love can do from an unknown author:

"This is what love does. Love walks into a hospital and pulls up a chair by the side of a hospital bed of a loved one. Love walks into a tough situation at work and helps open a new way of seeing things. Love looks right into the eyes of hate and proclaims another way to see the world. Love kneels in a garden to care for a plant that will nourish a community. Love is the first one to say sorry and take responsibility for their part. Love lets down its walls. Love comes close."

There is something that all of these situations have in common. **What is it?** Love comes close, but it may feel a bit distant during these times of social distancing. However, as we have learned, just because we are socially distant from each other, it does not necessarily mean we are emotionally distant from one another. While it is not ideal, phone calls, facebook, text messages, zoom and facetime are helping us to stay connected. I heard a friend say from the Loveland Mystics that I am a part of on Zoom this past week: "With being so isolated, I don't know what I would do, if I didn't have these zoom sessions to look forward to."

In the beginning of COVID, I kind of got zoomed out, but now I choose which zoom sessions I will participate from the many zoom sessions I am invited to. This is a form of self love we will talk about in a few minutes.

How many of you have been to Marriage Encounter? It is quite the weekend working on all kinds of things as a couple, but the thing I remember the most about this weekend was this motto:

LOVE IS A DECISION

Especially when the honeymoon is over, love is a decision to care about the other in little ways as well as big ways.

Thinking about this motto in all of our relationships, I wonder how many situations could have been resolved between parents and children, between siblings and between friends, if they simply understood this one thing.

Love is a decision.

There are probably more songs and poems written on the subject of love than any other topic. I don't know for sure, but it seems reasonable to think as the song goes from the Beatles, "All you need is love." All you need is love, but what kind of love are we talking about. In English, we pretty much have one word for love. There is a big difference in using the word love for different things. It is very different for someone to say to their lover, "I love you," and then hear one of them greet the dog and say, "I love you." These are two different kinds of love, but you wouldn't know it according to the English language.

Take a look at this overview of the word love from the Greek language:

- **Eros** (romantic, passionate love) ...
- **Philia** (affectionate love: deep conversation) ...
- **Agape** (selfless, universal love, unconditional) ...
- **Storge** (familiar love; platonic) ...
- **Mania** (obsessive love: imbalance between philautia & ludus) ...
- **Ludus** (playful love; characteristic in young love) ...
- **Pragma** (enduring love; long lasting) ...
- **Philautia** (self-compassion; healthy love of self)

As you can see there are many different words in the Greek to illustrate the different ways in which we can experience love in this world. By the way, handouts are available of these 8 kinds of love at the entrance of the church on the ushers table.

Then, there is this definition of love from first Corinthians 13, the love chapter:

4 Love is patient; love is kind; love is not envious or boastful or arrogant ⁵or rude. It does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful; ⁶it does not rejoice in wrongdoing, but rejoices in the truth. ⁷It bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things.

8 Love never ends.

This is a comprehensive definition of love, but how is this kind of love possible?

Yes, by the grace of God, all we have to do is ask and by the grace of God we can be empowered to Love in ways we never dreamed possible.

Pick one of these you know you need to work on. If you are having trouble picking one, ask the person who knows you best, and they will tell you. It is very humbling. Now, on the count of three everyone say out loud which one it is that you choose to work on ... One, two, three...

Let's say just a bit more about this grace of God thing. Notice I use that a lot. Why? Because I could not be here standing before you without it. It is the fuel by which I can choose to love, but there is something else that might help us experience this grace spoken of again and again in the scripture. **And what is that you ask?**

Remember the quote I gave you a couple of weeks ago or so? Here is another image of this quote:

Know God, Know Peace

I would add: Know God, Know Joy! Know God and Know Love!

Another way of understanding and seeing this is a verse from I John 4:7,8

“Beloved, let us love one another, for love is of God and the one who loves is born of God, and knows God. Anyone who does not love, does not know God, for God is love.”

This is the key to being able to love when you don't feel like loving. First, if we know God and that agape unconditional love, then we can more easily choose to love in a given situation.

Think about it. **What would love do now?** God's agape love is flowing through you. You can feel it, maybe not all of the time, but it is there for the asking. **How often do you ask God to fill you with love? How often do you ask God to fill you with JOY? How often do you ask God to fill you with PEACE?**

These are the themes from Advent and we can be transformed just by asking.

Matthew 7:7

Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and you shall find;
Knock, and it shall be opened unto you.”

What do you mean all we have to do is ask! It cannot be that simple! It is, so ask, and it shall be given you, seek, and you shall find; knock and the door shall be opened unto you. Listen to the wisdom in this quote:

Unconditional love is not so much about how we receive and endure each other, as it is about the deep vow to never, under any condition, stop bringing the flawed truth of who we are to each other.

Imagine with me if you will, how many know you and love you as you are, warts and all, unconditionally? List them on a piece of paper sometime.

Okay , we can start with God, who loves us with agape love, unconditionally with no strings attached. **But how many others are there in your life who love you like that?** There is something so freeing, so liberating when we are true to ourselves with others.

“And ye shall know the Truth
And the Truth shall make you free.”

And ye shall know the truth and the truth shall set you free! If we modify this verse a bit, we could say: “And ye shall know love and love shall make you free!

An old familiar song summarizes our advent themes of peace, joy and love as we prepare for the Sacrament of Holy Communion.

I've got peace like a river, joy like a fountain and love like an ocean in my soul!

Hymn of Preparation # 2145 TFWS I've Got Peace Like A River

(Choir asked to sing, but if needed it will be embedded into the powerpoint.)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DmpTt0pkeX8>