

November 18
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What The World Needs Now
2 Corinthians 13:11-13

(2 Corinthians 13:11-13 NRSV) Finally, brothers and sisters, farewell. Put things in order, listen to my appeal, agree with one another, live in peace; and the God of love and peace will be with you. {12} Greet one another with a holy kiss. All the saints greet you. {13} The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with all of you.

(2 Corinthians 13:11-13 The Message) And that's about it, friends. Be cheerful. Keep things in good repair. Keep your spirits up. Think in harmony. Be agreeable. Do all that, and the God of love and peace will be with you for sure. Greet one another with a holy embrace. All the brothers and sisters here say hello.

Words to Focus

Thomas Merton, monk and author of *The Seven Storey Mountain*, said that his advice for daily living was to “Be good, keep your feet dry, your eyes open, your heart at peace, and your soul in the joy of Christ.”

We continue this morning looking at the themes of ADVENT.

Adventus is the Latin word for "coming", and is the exact Latin equivalent for the Greek word *parousia*, commonly used in reference to the Second Coming.

The season of Advent thus serves a dual reminder of the original waiting that was done by the Hebrews for the birth of their Messiah as well as the waiting that we as Christians endure today as we await the second coming of Jesus the Christ.

Typically four themes are lifted up during the advent season, and it is those four themes that Jeff and I have been preaching on.

We began two weeks ago, with me asking the question: Should We Have Hope? Hope being a major theme for this season. Hopefully you have answered that question in the positive — recognizing that the glass is not half empty, but that at worst it is half full.

Jeff then followed that up last week talking about JOY. Joy is understanding that God loves us and accepts us just as we are, and desires us to live life abundantly.

Today we will look at LOVE → next week we will conclude with PEACE. Then we will truly begin the season of Advent as we will spend those four weeks looking at the places that are found in the birth stories and seek to understand what meaning there is in them for us.

William Barclay, a Scottish Bible scholar, in a communion service included this confession of sin:

*In our homes,
We have been careless and inconsiderate;
We have been moody and irritable and difficult to live with;
We have treated those whom above all we ought to cherish with a discourtesy we would never dare show to strangers;
For this forgive us, O God.*

Unfortunately, for most of us, Barclay is right on.

We become very comfortable in our relationships — and when that happens we start taking the people and the relationship we are in for granted — we stop being intentional.

While I was working on this sermon, I was sitting in a tire store, watching a father and his son.

The boy was trying desperately to get his father's attention — not in bad ways — he just wanted his dad to “be with him”

All the father wanted to do, was read Motor Trend magazine.

When the boy tried to point out something in the magazine, the father snapped at him

Does that mean that the father does not love his son?

NO, not at all — he just needed to remember Barclay's confession.

It is easy to become disconnected from those that we love.

Our society has developed all kinds of ways to help us become dis-connected from each other.

- When I was young, people would just drop by to visit.
In my first church in North Carolina, I was expected to just “drop by” someone's house on Sunday for lunch
The last thing most of us want today is somebody to just

drop by

- Once upon a time we would write letters to each other
Today we send e-mails
- Youth today don't call each other
They IM or Text Message each other
Creating a whole new language

One of the challenges of our society has got to be for us to connect with each other

To get us out of our castles and away from our cyber universes and actually connect with each other.

Have you ever wondered why we include a form of “the passing of the peace” in all of our services?

It is a chance for us, even in the midst of our worship, to recognize and remember that we need to connect with each other.

Paul, in our scripture this morning challenges us to “aim for perfection.” (2 Corinthians 13:11-13 NIV) Finally, brothers, good-by. Aim for perfection, listen to my appeal, be of one mind, live in peace. And the God of love and peace will be with you. {12} Greet one another with a holy kiss. {13} All the saints send their greetings.

And the way that we aim for perfection, is by being intentional with one another. By being in relationship with one another. By living in love with one another.

But the only way that we can do that is when we stop thinking that religion is all about us.

As a matter of fact, I would suggest that Christianity is not meant to be a “personal” religion.

Christianity is a team endeavor
there is no “I” in Christianity
It is not about you

It's about us —> all of us

Rich / Poor

Republicans / Democrats

Liberals / Conservatives

White / black
Iraqi / USAmerican

And Christianity only works when we care — when we love each other.

Yesterday, at the Men's breakfast we had Coach Marsh as our speaker — and his talk reminded me of a story:

The head coach at Gilman High School in Baltimore often asks his players a question — referring to himself and his coaches.

“What is our job?”

If you ask me — that seems like a strange thing to ask. But that is what the coach asks: “What is our job?”

And the answer?

“To love us!” the players yell back.

Then the coach shouts, “And what is *your* job!”

“To love each other!” the boys respond.

God tries to remind us, over and over, that loving each other is the key.

When asked the greatest commandment — what did Jesus say?

When Jesus was asked to name The Greatest commandment he chooses an intimately familiar portion of Scripture. Everyday a pious Jew is required to pray a morning and evening service of prayer. Among the prayers offered is the Shema, the sound of the first word of this prayer in Hebrew which begins "Shema Yisroel Adonai Eloheinu, Adonai Ehad" ("Hear O Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is One").

As the Shema continues it repeats the command found in Deuteronomy 6:5 "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind."

The God of Abundance, the God of Abundant Love, has provided us with redundant ways to experience and discern God's abundant love in outlines.

- We may experience God's love through our heart — through an upswelling of emotion which we can call heartfelt love.

- We may experience God's love through our soul — through a depth of spiritual stirrings and shakings and other soul stuff which we can call soul-felt [or soulful] love.
- We may experience God's love through our mind — expanding our intellect across a universe of knowledge which we can call mind-felt [or mindful] love.

Some of us are better at loving God through emotion.
Other of us are better at loving God through spiritual experiences.
Still others are better at loving God through intellectual pursuits.

All are important and valid, but Jesus offers to us another layer to this love by citing Leviticus 19:18:

"You shall love your neighbor as yourself."

Anyone who seeks to love God with heart and soul and mind will encounter God's love for creation, for all the universe, through each pathway. If we then genuinely love God then we too must love all creation — a creation which includes the self and the neighbor.

You see, the Greatest Commandment wasn't really a commandment at all: it was an invitation to a love relationship with God.

Love means loving the neighbor as one loves oneself.

It's easy to love humanity and yet still hate people. Jesus' reminds us that love is only real when it becomes involved in the other.

Aim for perfection Paul reminds us.

We can only do that when we learn to love.

Saint Augustine was asked to define love. This is what he said:

What does love look like? It has the hands to help others. It has the feet to hasten to the poor and needy. It has eyes to see misery and want. It has the ears to hear the sighs and sorrows of men. That is what love looks like.