

## **“THE ADVENT OF LOVE.”**

**Rev. Robert T. Woodyard**

**First Christian Reformed Church**

**December 21, 2014, 10:30AM**

**Scripture Text: Genesis 22; John 1:29; Romans 5:7-8; 8:31-32**

### **Introduction.**

Love. What is love? A team of professionals posed this question to a group of 4 to 10 year-olds and got back some wonderful answers:

"I think you're supposed to get shot with an arrow or something, but the rest of it isn't supposed to be so painful." – Manuel, age 8.

"Love is when a girl puts on perfume and a boy puts on shaving cologne and they go out and smell each other." – Karl, age 5.

"Love is when you tell a guy you like his shirt, then he wears it every day." – Noelle, age 7.

"Love is foolish...but I still might try it sometime." – Floyd, age 9.

"I know my older sister loves me because she gives me all her old clothes and has to go out and buy new ones." – Lauren, age 4.

"I let my big sister pick on me because my Mom says she only picks on me because she loves me. So I pick on my baby sister because I love her." – Bethany, age 4.

"When my grandmother got arthritis, she couldn't bend over and paint her toenails anymore. So my grandfather does it for her all the time, even when his hands got arthritis too. That's love."- Rebecca, age 8.

"Love is like a little old woman and a little old man who are still friends even after they know each other so well." – Tommy, age 6.

"Love is what's in the room with you at Christmas if you stop opening presents and listen."- Bobby, age 5.

"There are two kinds of love. Our love. God's love. But God makes both kinds of them."- Jenny, age 4.

Out of the mouths of babes.

## **God is love.**

How would you answer the question, what is love? The answer is, God is love. That is at once a *simple truth* we all know and also a *staggering truth* we cannot comprehend. It's one of the most profound and wonderful utterances in all the Bible.

Before there was a creation, before there were creatures, before there were human beings, God is love.

## ***God loved His Son.***

**John 3:35** The Father loves the Son and has given all things into his hand.

**John 17:24** Father, I desire that they also, whom you have given me, may be with me where I am, to see my glory that you have given me because you loved me before the foundation of the world.

## ***And the Son loves the Father.***

**John 14:31** I do as the Father has commanded me, so that the world may know that I love the Father.

Heaven is a place of incredible love. And any place on earth where there is love is a place where heaven has come down and touched earth. As we have seen with hope, peace and joy, God is the source of all love. It didn't evolve, all human love is an echo of God's love.

God is love. As you know most people think God is love, that God is a loving God and many people think that's the complete truth about God. As a result of their stunted understanding about God they have trouble understanding things like evil, suffering, death, punishment, judgment, hell, and most anything else negative.

God is love is a *summary truth* about the God of Scripture who created the world good, who judged the world when it went bad, who judged the world by a flood, who judged Israel by conquest and captivity, who judged sin by sending His Son to die for it, and who will one day judge the world in righteousness.

God who is love is also God who is light, the light of moral purity and holiness and perfect righteousness. God's love is a holy love, a firm love, a love that seeks holiness for His beloved.

**Hebrews 12:6, 10-11** For the Lord disciplines the one he loves, and chastises every son whom he receives.”

... 10 [God] disciplines us for our good, that we may share his holiness. 11 For the moment all discipline seems painful rather than pleasant, but later it yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness to those who have been trained by it.

This is also why as Christians we can know that every single thing that happens to us is an expression of God's love for us. Not some things, not most things, but all things come from His

Fatherly love and His loving purposes for us. God is love to believers in Jesus every moment of every day and in every circumstance. His providence may be hard sometimes, but it is always loving.

If the report comes back negative, God is love. If the report comes back positive, God is love. If we are successful God is love, if we fail God is love.

If we have a long and healthy life God is love, if we have a short and difficult life God is love.

If our children live long and prosper God is love, if our children don't God is love.

In sickness and health, in richer and poorer, in good times and bad, God is always love.

How can you tell when someone loves and how can you tell how much someone loves? One way is by how much they give. The measure of love is how much it gives, how costly it is, how great a sacrifice is involved.

### **Two stories of costly love.**

There was a time centuries ago when God tested a man to see what was in his heart, to test the measure of his love. It involved giving up an only son.

God promised **Abraham** He would give him a son even though he was very old and his wife was well past childbearing age. Abraham and Sarah waited 25 years and when Sarah was 90 she gave birth to the promised son, Isaac. Then when Isaac was a young boy, God tested Abraham and said to him, "Take your son, your only son Isaac, whom you love, and go to the land of Moriah, and offer him there as a burnt offering on one of the mountains of which I shall tell you" (Genesis 22:1-2, ESV).

Try to imagine how you would feel if God spoke those words to you. Especially when God says it the way He just said it. Notice three things God said to Abraham that must have each felt like a knife.

God said "take your only son." His only son, for whom he had waited all his life.

God said "take Isaac." God calls him by name, by the very name that God Himself had given him before he was born (Genesis 17:19).

Then God said "whom you love." It is almost as if God went out of His way to drive home how special this son was and how painful and hard and costly this command was.

And Abraham did as God said, but just before he killed his only son, God called out and stopped him because now He knew that Abraham loved and feared God more than anything else. He had the measure of the man and the measure of his love.

***This story is a shadow***, a story that anticipates another story, a very similar story when God the Father, sent to be sacrificed His one and only Son who is **Jesus**, named by God before He was born. About Him the Father said, "This is my Son whom I love and in whom I am well pleased" (Matthew 3:17; 17:5).

When God sent His only Son to earth as a sacrifice for our sins, He put His own love to the test and it was a test of God's heart, a test of His love for us; a demonstration of the measure of God's love for those who are the objects of His affections.

There is one very important difference between the two stories. As Abraham and Isaac got near to Mount Moriah, Isaac asked his father, "Where is the lamb for the burnt offering." Abraham answered, "God will provide for Himself the lamb for a burnt offering, my son" (Genesis 22:7-8). And He did.

But there was no substitute for Jesus. He was the Lamb of God, the lamb of love, who would take away the sins of the world (John 1:29, 36; Revelation 5:6-14).

Another difference in the two stories. Abraham was prepared to sacrifice His only Son in obedience to the command of a loving God whom he loved and worshiped. God on the other hand sacrificed His only Son for a people who did not love Him, in fact, who were and still are rebellious and hostile toward Him, who reject His love and His gift. This is one reason why loving our enemies is especially reflective of God's love, he loved us when we were his enemies.

**Romans 5:7-8** For one will scarcely die for a righteous person ... 8 but God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.

This is the greatest act of love, the supreme sacrifice, the ultimate gift. God spared Abraham's son, but He did not spare His own Son.

**Romans 8:31-32** What then shall we say to these things? If God is for us, who can be against us? 32 He who did not spare his own Son but gave him up for us all, how will he not also with him graciously give us all things?

This supreme gift is the crowning proof of God's extravagant love, and it's the guarantee of all the rest of God's gifts of love.

We are the objects of His infinitely great affections. This is an indescribable gift, a measureless measure of immeasurable love, an amazing act of astonishing proportions.

The most familiar verse in the Bible may be **John 3:16**, "For God so loved the world, He sent His only begotten Son..." The problem is, it's so familiar that it no longer stirs up amazement and awe and wonder. That phrase has been reduced to a big sign held up in an end zone. It doesn't astonish us anymore the way it did Charles Wesley when he wrote, "Amazing love! How can it be that Thou my God shouldst die for me?"

No other religion makes the claim that Christianity makes, that God is love and that He loves us so much to come down and dwell among us and become like us.

**I John 4:9-10** In this the love of God was made manifest among us, that God sent his only Son into the world, so that we might live through him. 10 In this is love, not that we have loved God but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins.

### **How do we respond to so great a love?**

Do we *wonder* as we wander at this thing which God has done, do we wonder at this miracle, at the staggering significance of Christ's coming, of His birth, of God becoming flesh, of the magnitude of the indescribable gift revealing an incomprehensible love? No one has ever loved us the way God has loved us in Christ.

If we were to occupy our minds and hearts with wondering about this wondrous love that God has for His people, our small affections would begin to swell into overflowing love for God and others. One of the reasons for the smallness of love in us is we think so little about God's great love for us in Christ.

**I John 3:1** See what kind of love the Father has given to us, that we should be called children of God.

*Imitate* God's love.

**I John 4:11** Beloved, if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another.

**John 13:35** By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.

The God of love gives us His love to enable us to love one another.

**John 17:26** I made known to them your name, and I will continue to make it known, that the love with which you have loved me may be in them, and I in them.

Even His *enemy love*.

**Matthew 5:43-44** "You have heard that it was said, 'You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.' 44 But I say to you, Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, 45 so that you may be sons of your Father who is in heaven.

### **Application:**

If the measure of God's love for you and me is Christ, and by giving us Christ, He demonstrates that He is willing to give us all things, some questions come to mind:

"Why do I ever grumble and show discontent and resentment at the circumstances in which God has placed me? Why am I ever distrustful, fearful, or anxious? Why do I ever allow myself to grow cool, formal and halfhearted in the service of the God who loves me so? Why do I ever allow my loyalties to be divided, so that God has not all my heart?"

“Could an observer learn from the quality and degree of love that I show to others – my wife? my family? my neighbors? people at church? people at work? – anything at all about the greatness of God’s love to me?” (Packer, *Knowing God*, p. 115).

Wonder as you wander through this season about the greatness of God’s love for you and the greatness of your love for Him and others. May you more and more know the greatness of His love, the breadth and length and height and depth of the love of Christ and may your love abound more and more as you do.

May our love for God be manifested in our sheer delight in God as God. May our love be shown in our enjoyment of God, in our rejoicing in who He is and all He has done, in hungering and thirsting for more of Him. May our love be shown in our surrender to God and to His love and His will.

Will you join me in praying that God would grant that all of us grasp more and more what it is to be loved by Christ, to be the objects of God’s affections such that nothing can separate us from His love for us in Christ.

Will you join me in praying that every person here would personally feel loved in this way and be able to say with Paul, “It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me. And the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me [me personally] and gave himself for me” (Galatians 2:20, ESV).

### **Prayer:**

**Ephesians 3:14-19** For this reason I bow my knees before the Father, 15 from whom every family in heaven and on earth is named, 16 that according to the riches of his glory he may grant you to be strengthened with power through his Spirit in your inner being, 17 so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith—that you, being rooted and grounded in love, 18 may have strength to comprehend with all the saints what is the breadth and length and height and depth, 19 and to know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge, that you may be filled with all the fullness of God.

Almighty and merciful God, we exult and praise you for the greatness of your love and for the incredible reflection of that love in Your Son, our Savior, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sins of the whole world. We rejoice this morning at your gift. Grant that in our own brokenness, anxiety, doubts and fears we may live our lives as a reflection of the Lamb of God, in meekness and humility, in sacrifice and service, in willingness to give in love. May the love of the Lamb make our faith in Christ unshakable, our witness more bold, our love more unconditional. And grant that one day we will see the Lamb in all His glory, standing before the throne of God.