

Love

Welcome to the second week of Advent!

Advent is a season right before Christmas where we prepare our hearts, our minds and our souls to receive Christ.

Every week we will have an Old Testament reading of a prophesy of hope that was given to the ancient Israelites. The prophesies gave hope that there would be a Messiah, a savior born that will redeem mankind.

Then we will have a New Testament reading of people actually preparing for the imminent coming of Christ. We will hear about people in these scriptures having hope, but they will also see the Love, Joy and Peace that can come to all of us through our Faith in God.

So last week we discussed hope – and now this week we look at love.

Love is a curious thing. When you ask two people what love means to them, you may hear two different definitions.

I have a few quotes to share with you about love:

Love isn't blind, it only sees what matters.

If you love someone more than anything, then distance only matters to the mind, not to the heart.

If I had a single flower for every time I thought of you, I could walk forever in my garden.

It is better to have lost a love than to never have loved at all.

They can take away everything I have, but they can't take away my love for you.

Then we have some famous people giving us quotes:

Sonny and Cher, "Love will keep us together" – well at least until their divorce.

Forrest Gump said – "I might not be a smart man, but I know what love is."

So what is love? What does love look like?

1 Corinthians 13

We can see love around us in many different ways. Many of you have been married for years and truly love your spouse. Can we get everyone who has been married for 10 years or longer to please stand or if you were married for 10 years or longer and your spouse has passed. Less than 20 please sit. Less than 30 please sit... etc...

Love is a commitment. A commitment to each other.

But love isn't just between husband and wife – but also between parents and children.

It is an interesting kind of love that happens between parents and children. When you are expecting a child as a couple you are excited, completely in love with each other and you already love your unborn child. Then you have a little baby that is completely helpless and needs you for everything – his/her survival depends on you.

Those can be hard times, waking up at all hours during the night; maybe your child has colic and you don't get much sleep for days. Little children just push you almost to your limit, but you still love them because they are your flesh, your blood, a product of the love between you and your spouse – they depend on you for their very survival.

Then they grow up - and become teenagers, and love takes on a whole new meaning. Not all teenagers, but many, simply don't reciprocate the love that parents give them. They may call their parents stupid or say that they don't even need parents because they can do things on their own.

Then they grow up some more and start their own families, and then that love may change again as they want to have a new or different relationship with their parents.

But it isn't always a smooth relationship. People have their own beliefs as they grow older, their own way of doing things, and as adult children, they may want independence away from their parents.

As adults, this can be hard for us. As parents, we want to be a part of our children's lives and still want to feel needed. As children, we still need our parents, but not in the way they had provided for us in the past.

We still love each other, but that relationship has changed.

As we get older, and as we mature - our relationship with God might change as well. Maybe we don't think we need him as much, maybe we think we can handle things on our own - or maybe we think that since we have turned our back on him so many times that it would be too hard to start our relationship over again.

But through reading the Bible, we know that God still loves us even if we don't reciprocate that love towards him. We still have the hope that through his grace and love there is something more waiting for us. God gave the ancient Jews hope through their prophets.

Then God showed us just how much he loved us. Through a miracle of grace that only a loving God could give, he gave us Jesus – a piece of himself – God incarnate – the only Son of God – to be among us – to live a life without sin – and then to die a sinner's death – all to offer us eternal life.
John 3:16

God so loved the world. The original text was written in Greek and there are several words in Greek that translate to our word love.

But every time the Bible talks about God's love toward humanity, the word in the original writings is the Greek word, "Agape" which means unconditional love. A type of love that brings forth caring - regardless of circumstance.

Many of us have or try to have unconditional or “Agape” love for our kids. Even when they walk away, slam the door and say “I hate you” we still love them. That is similar to how God feels about us – but he takes it a step further.

If our children or spouse or someone else we love pushed us away, and kept pushing us away, eventually we might stop loving them or stop caring about them. But not God. No matter how much we push him away, he still loves us and still desires a relationship with us. He truly has an unconditional love for us.

But how do we see that love? How do we prepare our hearts, our minds and our souls to receive this love that God has for us? To truly start to feel God’s love working in our lives?

In the scripture lesson from the Gospel of Matthew that Al read for us earlier, John the Baptizer was telling people back then to prepare their hearts, minds and soul to receive God’s love, and that love was happening in front of them. John was preparing the way for Jesus to come into their lives.

He told the people to turn towards God and truly ask for forgiveness of their sins and try to live as better person – one that tries to love others and tries to accept others.

This is the same message we have today. As we reflect on this time of year and we look with anticipation to the celebration of Christ's birthday, we also need to prepare our hearts, our minds and our souls - to receive Christ - not just into a manger – but to receive Christ as our Savior into our lives.

The Bible tells us we should turn towards God and thank him for forgiving us for all the times we have turned our backs on him, for all the times we might not have loved him the way we should, and for the times we didn't truly love our neighbors with our hearts.

Doing this helps us to get rid of the baggage that may be weighing down our hearts to make a little more room for God there. Because God loves us and wants us to love him.

We need to remember that God loved the world so much he gave his only Son – so we can have everlasting life.

Now – when we say “the world” we aren't just talking about the planet and the land and the oceans because the word Agape was used. So that means an unconditional love -- for us.

So when Jesus spoke these words he was referring to mankind and even to us as individuals.

As we prepare our hearts, minds and souls for Christ this year, let's clear out the baggage in our hearts, thank God for loving us, and accept his love into our lives. Then, who knows, we might find we have a little more love to give to others this year and maybe they will see Christ in a different way as well.

Pastor: Mark Maddox
520- 207-6453
pastor@umcSanctuary.org
www.umcSanctuary.org