



ADVENT – LOVE

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I. Introduction

In April of last year our church held a service to celebrate the life of Brenda Gray. She and her husband Tom were members of our church and good friends with many who still attend. When Brenda was unwell, she told her family and especially her husband Tom that she wanted a special reading from the Bible to be read at her service when she went to be with the Lord.

This was the reading Tom gave during that service: “Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. It does not dishonour others, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs. Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always preserves. Love never fails.”

I’ve read that verse in Bible studies and in Bible college. But it has never appeared to be as beautiful a truth then when it was read in the midst of great family sorrow. Family members were gathered to celebrate Brenda’s life feeling deep pain and loss. And Brenda wanted her last words for her family to be about love, the love of God to them through her. A love that she experienced from God even while she was in great pain.

We can miss God’s love when we think everything is going well in our lives. We can miss the real value and treasure that it is. We may think love is merely the feeling of attraction to others or experiences that give meaning or passion to life. Of course, we’re tempted to think of love as an experience we receive. But God’s love as experienced in the world but uniquely through His Son seems quite different!

God’s love isn’t described as a feeling that He experiences from others, but as zeal to engage with pain and sorrow of others in order to heal and restore. God’s love is revealed in the sending of that which was precious to Him, His Son, so that humanity would be restored. Love gives everything that is good in order to heal and restore that which is not.

Today, on the second Sunday of Advent, we are going to focus on God’s love. Let it be our prayer, as a family of faith, to be open to God’s Spirit as he teaches us about God’s love and how we might share in it with Him.

II. Context

Let’s first look briefly at the context of today’s passage in the Bible. What metaphor does God give us to help us understand better His love? The one metaphor that we will be looking at is how God is described as a Father. God is described in the Bible as humanity’s Heavenly Father. Because He is our Father, and because He is a good Father, He loves us as His own.

You may remember a sermon I gave some time ago that described God as the Kinsman-Redeemer. In the ancient Near East kinsmen thought of themselves as a body. Each member had a different function, but collectively they had a shared life. If one member of the body was under attack, the entire body was to rally to its support.

So, God as our Heavenly Father sees humanity as His children and therefore is compelled to support His children when something goes wrong. In last week's sermon we saw how God entered the Garden after Adam and Eve had disobeyed Him and were then living in guilt and shame. He covered their shame by making garments for them and His plan was then to cover their inward guilt and shame through an offspring that was to come.

In today's passage God sees the pain and affliction of Israel living as slaves in Egypt. Again, seeking to support and restore, God's love compels towards action. In Exodus 3:1–6, God seeks out Moses and calls to him through a burning bush. He then tells Moses that He is the Divine ruler that has been caring for his family. God says, "I am the God of your father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac and the God of Jacob." Now, Moses, who himself has run away from Egypt in shame because he had murdered someone, who is hiding away "to the far side of the wilderness" tending to flocks of sheep, is confronted by God. And God will show to Moses His love for His people. God will call Moses to follow His love by restoring a people who are enslaved.

III. Unpack

1.) Love Sees

In Exodus 3:7–10, God comes near to Moses and shares with him what He sees. "I have indeed seen the misery of my people in Egypt. I have heard them crying out because of their slave drivers, and I am concerned about their suffering." Certainly Moses knows this as well. He was there and he saw their suffering first hand! In fact, he killed an Egyptian who was abusing an Israelite.

But God sees the enslaved Israelites differently than Moses did. The eyes of Moses were focused on the oppressors, the Egyptians. And his eyes were filled with hatred. God's eyes are focused on the Israelites and because His eyes are filled with love, He purposes to take them out of Egypt and restore to them a land of promise, a land flowing with milk and honey.

Moses is being invited to see the plight of Israel in Egypt differently. No longer being motivated by hatred, God is now sharing life with Moses. Now Moses is being taught to see his fellow Israelites not merely as objects in need of his protection, but as brothers and sisters in need of full restoration. Moses is called to go back to Egypt and see the situation with opened eyes, eyes directed by love.

2.) Love Encourages

In Exodus 3:11–17, God, knowing that Moses will feel inadequate to follow Him back into Egypt, encourages him. Moses appeals to God saying, "Who am I that I should go to Pharaoh and bring Israel out of Egypt?" God reminds Moses that He will be with him. Moses, still feeling the shame of being separated from God rightfully feels inadequate to the task being asked of him. But because God loves, He knows that He will have to encourage Moses by convincing him that He will be with him.

But God also knows that He will have to encourage the Israelites who will be like Moses, and be motivated by fear. So God equips Moses to love, to encourage the people of Israel. God says that the very mountain where He is speaking to Moses, Mount Horeb, will be a place where Israel will worship their God. And God tells Moses to tell Israel that the Great I AM, the God of creation, the God of Adam, Seth, Noah, Abraham, Isaac and Jacob has sent Moses to rescue them. God's intent is to encourage Moses and the tribes of Israel so that they would follow Him knowing that He loves them.

God also seeks to encourage Israel by telling them that He will restore them to their Promised Land. Not only will Israel be rescued from captivity but they will receive a land of their own and one that is blessed and abundantly fruitful. They will reap the benefits of their labour and have an inheritance to pass along to their children and their children's children. God seeks to encourage Moses and Israel to follow Him, to receive His love for them.

3.) Love Gives

In Exodus 3:18–22, God has shared with Moses his love for him and for Israel. God has revealed to Moses that He sees their oppression. His desire to bless them compels Him to strengthen their resolve to follow Him, so He encourages them. His love for them is also made evident through what He will give to them even before they reached their Promised Land. God will give them a foretaste of His blessing. God says, "I will make the Egyptians favourably disposed toward (them), so that when (they) leave (they) will not go empty-handed. Every woman is to ask (of all the Egyptian women)...for article of silver and gold and for clothing, which (they) will put on (their) sons and daughters. And (they) will plunder the Egyptians."

This plundering is fair payment for the years of enslavement placed upon the Israelites. The years of enslavement where the Egyptians only received the benefit of Israel's hard work. The love of God ensures Israel receives a blessing through those that stole from them. The love of God also desires to lead Israel back to full restoration of their inheritance on Earth.

Love doesn't merely see and encourage, it gives as well. Love ensures that the Israelites will leave Egypt with at least something for their labours and struggles.

IV. Application

What is our application for today?

1.) Let us follow Him and see others as He does

How does God see us? He sees us as children who were meant to rule with Him over creation. He sees people enslaved to sin and therefore enslaved to others around them. He sees people who desire to be set free. And He invites us to follow Him through Jesus and by His Holy Spirit. He invites us to see others around us the way He sees others.

Many of you will remember that I once worked in Japan on a missionary visa. I taught English for a church outreach. After four years of working nearly every day, I burned out. I was so exhausted I had little to no emotional capacity for others. I was almost completely indifferent to what was happening around me.

During that time, I flew to Hawaii and was considering my next steps. I met with a friend of mine who was the Dean at a Bible college in Honolulu. And although I had met with a number of my friends since I had been back from Japan, it was this friend, John, who really saw where I was at. He looked at me carefully and slowly began to counsel me. He eventually told me to journal my thoughts and experiences in Japan. He knew that my eventual restoration would happen as I communicated even on paper what I was holding onto in my head.

Over the next few weeks, I gradually started to put my thoughts onto paper, and I still have that journal today. The journal is filled with a number of insights I learned while living in Japan. It remains to me a source of inspiration and joy. I owe this to my friend who saw where I was at and acted. May we all see as God does. May we see people where they are at and act, offering help in order to restore them.

2.) Let us follow Him and encourage others as He does

I think we often see where people are at. We can see them struggle, with helping people so that they are restored. Remember the parable of the Good Samaritan. We often think we have more important things to do than to get involved in a complicated situation that would require a sacrificial effort to resolve. But thank the Lord that He encourages us to serve others in those situations. When we walk with Jesus, we get encouragement along the way to love our neighbour as we ought.

As a young person following Jesus, one of my friends at church asked if I could help a young teenager that he had met through his youth ministry. This young teenage girl had a terrible relationship with her mother, her father was no longer around for her, and she had started drinking heavily. I got to know her and to help her when I could. When she needed a place to stay, me and another friend of mine had found her a place to stay with a Christian family.

But one day I found out that she was pregnant, and she didn't know what to do. I was shocked, but God encouraged me and helped me to connect and network with our brothers and sisters in Christ in Hawaii and eventually find resources for this very scared and hurting young woman. We think that events around us are beyond us, much like Moses did, but when we follow Jesus, he encourages us so that we follow through on what love may require of us. Let us follow God and receive his encouragement to love those around us.

3.) Let us follow Him and give to others as He does

There are many people in our church that give generously to those who need help. Our church family gave generously last year to a number of important ministries in New Zealand and in a variety of places around the world. Today we can praise God for His encouragement that we might give generously to those in great need around the world. Praise God not only during our Missions Month appeal but also today when we reflect of God's love that moves us to give.

Think of the many missionaries and ministries in some of the most difficult places in the world. Our brothers and sisters in faith serving people groups in countries where the government treats them worse than slaves. And while other governments fear advocating too strongly for the minority groups because of fear of economic reprisals, God sends his children, us, to live among the minority groups

to minister to them and to give them what they can. The world can be filled with people who wish someone would do something about the wrongs in society, but it is God's love that mobilizes His children to be the solution and to give what they can to help.

This upcoming year, when we begin again to pay closer attention to the missionaries and missions we support, let us remember that God desires to fill us with His Spirit and His love that we would follow Him and support those that are giving all they can to those with the greatest need. Let our missions remind us of what we are to be involved in here in Milford every day because behind our missions is God's love that moves us.

V. Conclusion

- 1.) Let us follow Him and see others as He does**
- 2.) Let us follow Him and encourage others as He does**
- 3.) Let us follow Him and give to others as He does**