

# Love

January 7, 2024

Welcome to the Beamsville Church of Christ online ministry. This week's message is titled "Love" and it completes this year's Advent series. Thank you to Amy, Ed, Heather and Don for being part of the service. The scripture reading is Matthew 3, 13 to 17. Happy birthday this week to Marie and to Donna.

## Welcome, Announcements, Prayer

Good morning everybody. Happy to see you here this morning. I'm going to start with a few announcements. I want to wish a happy birthday to Tabitha, Johanne, Happy and Rebecca. None of whom are here, but happy birthday to them anyway. If you have any suggestions for next year's budget, please speak to myself, to Amy or one of the elders. And please give me your receipts on or before January 15th. If you want your money back, you've got to give me a receipt. Neema has her immigration visa in hand. It's in her passport with the right stamps. They're figuring out a flight so they can be reunited. So that is an answered prayer and we're really excited about that. Paul, who is here today, has had a surgery and has more coming up for kidney stones. And that is not great, but it's better than not doing that, I think. Yes, I'm getting a nod. So we keep him in our prayers as well. And then, of course, we are continuing to pray for Pam and for Care. And we're happy that Jo is here with us this morning. So we're really glad to see you today. Let's go to God in prayer. Oh, yeah, for sure.

Let's go to God in prayer now. Lord, it is good to be in your presence to celebrate your first coming, to look forward to your return to this earth. Thank you for each one gathered here this morning. For those who we haven't seen for a while, we rejoice in their presence. For those who are not able to be with us, we ask that you make our love known to them, that your presence will be felt in their lives. Thank you for the healing you have granted for so many. Thank you for the bodies mended, the hearts put back together. Lord, we know that there are many who continue to suffer, and we ask for your continued hand in their lives to show that you love them. You've got this under control. Please help us to be supportive of them and to know what we can do to ease their burdens. Lord, as we turn our thoughts to worshipping you and lifting your name on high, we ask for right minds, right hearts, and that we would be focused wholly on you today. It's in Jesus' name that we pray. Amen.

## Song Leader

Our sermon this morning is going to be based on love, and so I've selected a couple of songs, one before the sermon and one after, that emphasize this really important biblical principle. When Jesus asks, "What do you have to do to be saved?" He sends it back to the people who asked the question, "What do you think? What's the law say?" He says, "Love God and love each other." So we're going to be looking at that principle today in our sermon. I invite you to stand, please.

## Communion

Good morning. So the Christmas story that our children retold left off at the shepherds, and sometimes we cut it off there, and sometimes we include a little bit more of the story. Who--children, I'm going to include you in this--who else do we usually talk about in this story? Robin. The wise men. The wise men are sometimes included and sometimes not included, because we don't really know the timeline. It was

sometime within the first couple of years, and the wise men came and they brought three really bizarre gifts for babies, gold, frankincense, and myrrh, which anybody who has been a mother is like, "Ooh, thank you." Not diapers. Not something that would be super useful. But I actually asked to do this communion talk in August. In August I hit a section in Exodus where gold, frankincense, and myrrh occur together. There are only two places in the Bible that gold, frankincense, and myrrh are a three-pack, and they are the gifts of the wise men, and this section randomly from Exodus 30. The tail end of Exodus, they have been given instruction on how to build a tabernacle. It is involved. There is a lot that goes into making a tabernacle, which is a place of worship and a place of sacrifice. Exodus 30 is wrapping up those instructions, and I'm going to read the section about gold, the section about frankincense, and the section about myrrh from Exodus 30.

So first off, gold. Make an altar of acacia wood for burning of incense. It is to be square, a cubit long, a cubit wide, and two cubits high. It's horns of one piece with it, over the lay of the top and all of the sides of the horns with pure gold. Make a gold molding around it. Make two gold rings for the altar below the molding, two on the opposite sides to hold the poles to carry it. Make the poles of acacia wood and overlay them with gold. Put the altar in front of the curtain that is before the ark of the testimony, before the atonement covenant, and over the testimony where I will meet you. Okay, so gold is on the altar of incense, which is different from the altar of sacrifice. The altar of incense is right before the holy of holies, and incense is burned twice a day before the presence of God on this golden altar.

Let's jump to myrrh. Then the Lord said to Moses, "Take the following fine spices, five hundred shekels of liquid myrrh, half as much of that, that is two hundred and fifty shekels of fragrant cinnamon, two hundred and fifty shekels of fragrant cane, five hundred shekels of cassa, all according to the sanctuaries shekel and a hin of olive oil. Make these into a sacred anointing oil, a fragrant blend, and the work of a perfumer. It will be sacred anointing oil, then use it to anoint the tent of the meeting, the ark of the testimony, the table and all of its articles, the lampstands and its accessories, the altars of incense, the altar of burnt offering, and all of its utensils, the basins with its stand. You shall consecrate them so they will be most holy. Whatever touches them will be holy. Anoint Aaron and his sons and consecrate them so that they may serve me as priests. Say to the Israelites, "This is to be my sacred anointing oil for generations to come. Do not pour it over men's bodies and do not make oil with the same formula. It is sacred and you are to consider it sacred. Whoever makes perfume like it, whoever puts it on, anyone other than a priest must be cut off from his people." So we have gold, the altar before God where incense is offered daily with prayers. We have myrrh which is the main ingredient of the anointing oil that anoints and consecrates the tools of the temple and anoints and consecrates the priests.

And then we have frankincense. Then the Lord said to Moses, "Take a fragrant spices, gum resin, ochyna, galbum, and pure frankincense all in equal amounts. And then make a fragrant blend of incense, the work of the perfumer. It is to be salted, pure, and sacred. Grind some of it into a powder and place it in front of the testimony in the tent of meeting where I will meet with you."

When we look ahead at Matthew and we get these three gifts, the gold, the frankincense, and the myrrh, to the Israelites are they seeing we are getting the altar on which to offer our prayers, the oil on which to consecrate our priest, and the myrrh, not the myrrh, the frankincense, the incense that marks the place that this is where God will meet us. That is really powerful to me that those are the three gifts

to the baby. Those gifts that connect back to the original covenant promises in the original covenant back in Exodus. Those three gifts mean something very different than diapers. They don't appear together again. Nowhere else in the Bible do we see those three things together. And I don't think that is a coincidence or a mistake. Let's pray together.

Dear God, we thank you for who you are. We thank you for the clues that you left through generations before you came and generations since you have come. God, we thank you that you are the altar on which our prayers can be offered, that you are the oil that anoints the priest, and that you are marking the place that you will meet us here, and that you mark that place at the manger, and you mark that place again at the cross. God, we thank you for the sacrifice and for your love and for your ongoing covenant promises. In Jesus' name, amen.

## Reading

### Matthew 3:13-17

Then Jesus came from Galilee to the Jordan to be baptized by John. But John tried to deter him saying, "I need to be baptized by you, and you come to me."

And then Jesus replied, "Let it be so now. It is proper for us to do this, to fulfill all righteousness." And then John consented. As soon as Jesus was baptized, he went up out of the water. At that moment, heaven was open, and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and alighting on him. And a voice from heaven said, "This is my Son, whom I love. With him, I am well pleased."

## Sermon

### Love

Good morning, everyone. Who says church can't be fun?

Linda Rayburn tells this story. "I'll never forget the Christmas of my seventh year. I was going to sing several carols with my classmates at the Christmas pageant at school. We had been practicing for about a month. A week before the pageant, my mother's family had their Christmas celebration. Mother had been bragging about how I was going to sing at school, and I was congealed into singing one of the carols of the Colter clan gathered there. Telling my aunt which carol to play, I sang out as sweetly and sincerely as only a seven-year-old can when I said these words, Hark! Old herald's angel sings, glory to the newborn King. Peace on earth, so mercy smiles, because God and reptiles reconciled." That's as far as I got, because my aunt could no longer play the piano. She was laughing so hard. My uncle laughed so hard he spilled his drink on his lap, and when he tried to mop it up, he lost his balance and slid out of his chair. I was mortified. I had no idea why everyone was laughing at me. And I burst into tears. And I ran upstairs to my bedroom crying. I really was surprised when my oldest and most straight-laced aunt came into my room. I had always been a little afraid of her. She tenderly took me in her arms, and with loving words, she told me not to cry. Everyone was laughing because of the wonderful new words I had sung for the Christmas carol. And even though everyone else had learned it different, hers was so much better. Mine was so much better. So she kissed me and then washed my face and told me to come downstairs with her because there was a surprise waiting for her. Hand in hand, we took the stairs down to the living room, and just as we got there, the music began to play, and the whole Colter family began to sing my words. As I stood listening to them sing my misconstrued version of "Hark, the herald

angels sing," I felt more loved than ever in my life. My lips were still trembling as I stepped forward and began to sing. As my extended family sang carol after carol, and arms slipped around each other in a warm, familiar glow, I recognized Christmas wasn't about festive decorations, or even the Christmas tree, or even the gifts under it. Christmas was about love, given freely and with joy. As one of my older cousins gave me a squeeze and a smile, I was sure "Hark, old herald angel was singing with us," and I had gotten the words right after all.

Christmas is so unique in so many ways. For many of us, when we remember our children and our grandchildren, the joy, the love that they have through it all. So we've been going through Advent, and today the last of Advent is love. And as was mentioned today, we're going to have a service here this evening, and if you can be part of that, we would welcome you. And so today I'm just going to really not make too many comments, but just read from Scripture. In Luke chapter 1, 26 through 38, the angel went to her and said, "Greetings, you who are highly favored. The Lord is with you." But Mary was greatly troubled at his words, and wondered what kind of greeting this might be. But the angel said to her, "Don't be afraid. You have found favor with God."

I have to stop there. Don't be afraid. You have found favor with God. And I like to think that's what God is saying to us. Don't be afraid. You have found favor with God, because we love him so much. He'll never leave us. He'll never forsake us. He is always with us, not just at Christmas time, but always. And don't be afraid. He said, "You will be with child and give birth to his son, and you are to give him the name Jesus. He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High. The Lord will give him the throne of his father David, and he will reign over the house of Jacob forever. His kingdom will never end. And we are part of that kingdom. We are part of the Christmas story.

"How will this be? How will this be?" Mary asked. "Since I am a virgin?" And the angel answered, "The Holy Spirit will come upon you. The power of the Most High will overshadow you, so the Holy One to be born will be called the Son of God." Even Elizabeth, your relative, is going to have a child in her old age. And it was said that she was barren, but she's in her sixth month, for nothing is impossible with God. "I am the Lord's servant," Mary asked. At a young age, all the pressure for her, and yet there was something about her, something very, very precious. "I am the Lord's servant. May it be to me, as you have said." And then the angel left her. And this reminds me of what the Hebrew writer said with these words. "Are not angels ministering spirits sent to serve those who inherit salvation." We have angels actively working in our lives, but for most of the time, we don't know it. That accident could have happened, but maybe an angel intervened. An illness may have come to us, but maybe it was intervened by an angel. Scripture says it in the book of Hebrews. "Are not angels ministering spirits sent to serve those who inherit salvation." We have angels serving us.

And so she says, "My soul glorifies the Lord, and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior, for he has been mindful of the humble estate of his servant. From now on, all generations will call me blessed. The mighty one has done great things for me. Holy is his name. His mercy extends to all those who revere him from generation to generation, as we do today. He has performed mighty deeds in his arm. He has scattered those who are proud in their utmost thoughts. He has brought down rulers from their thrones, but has lifted up the humble. He has filled the hungry with good things, and has set the rich sometimes away empty. He has helped his servant Israel, remembering to be merciful to Abraham and his descendants as us, forever, even as he said to our fathers. And even at a young age, Mary was a brilliant person who opened up her life and said yes to God, yes to Christmas.

So Mary gives birth to her firstborn, places him in a manger because there was no room available. At the same time, there were shepherds living out in the fields, as we've heard today. Keeping their sheep, watching their flocks overnight, and an angel of the Lord shone around them. I'm sure these shepherds have seen many, many things out in the fields, but they've never seen anything like this. An angel of the Lord shone around them and they were terrified. But the angel said to them, to these terrified shepherds, don't be afraid. I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people. See, we're part of the story. Today in the town of David, a savior has been born to you. You will find a baby wrapped in cloths and lying in a manger. Suddenly, this great company of the heavenly host appeared with the angel, praising God and saying glory to God in the highest and on earth, peace to those whom his favor rests. And then Mary treasured up all these things in her heart. The shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all the things they had heard and seen, which were just as they had been told. And for the rest of their life, the shepherds might say, I got a story to tell you. Isn't all of this wonderful? Isn't it incredible?

This Christmas, the present is Jesus himself. The gift is Jesus himself, who comes to us, who lives in us. Jesus, our savior. No wonder John 3 16, one of the most powerful scriptures in all the Bible, is quoted so often for God so loved the world that he gave his only son. There are believes in him and we believe in him, don't we? Believes in him. You won't perish, but have life eternal. The shepherds didn't realize when they looked at the eyes of that baby, they were looking at the eyes of the son of God. God, the father, God, the son, God, the Holy Spirit were in this little manger. The most incredible of all events.

The advent themes are remarkable. Hope, peace, love and joy. Jesus and love and Christmas time go hand in hand. And if you ever get the idea that God is too strict, take a concordance like I did this past week and just notice how often God and love are connected throughout the scriptures. I was going to read them, but we'd be here for quite some time, but I'll give you a couple. 13 5 of Hebrews, but I trust your unfailing love. It's remarkable. Psalms 23, surely goodness and love will follow me all the days of help me of my life. Every day. 31 7, I'll be glad and rejoice in your love. Having a bad day, rejoice. God is always with us. May your love and your truth protect us. 86 and 15, you are a gracious God, slow in anger, yet abounding in love. 100 and verse 5 for the Lord is good and his love endures forever. 119 and 8, preserve my life, O Lord, according to your love, not our love, your love, his love that he puts into our hearts. Wow.

Or 1 Corinthians 13 that we all know so well called the love chapter. And rightly so. If I speak in the languages of men and speak in the languages of angels, but have not love, I am only a resounding gong or a clanging symbol. Which nobody wants to hear. And if I have the gift of prophecy. And if I could fathom all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have faith that can move mountains. But don't have love. It means nothing. I am nothing. If I give all I possess to the poor. If I surrender my body to the flames, but have not love. I haven't gained anything. Because here's what love is. Love is so important at Christmas time. Love is patient. If you have grandchildren, you need patience. Love is kind. Love doesn't envy. Love doesn't boast. It's not proud. It's not rude. Never. It's not self seeking. It's not easily angered. Although sometimes it keeps no record of wrongs. Love does not delight in evil. But rejoices with the truth. Because love always protects. Love always trusts. Love always hopes. Love always perseveres. Always. Because, help me, love never fails. Never. Not even one time.

So when the Apostle Paul was writing to the book of Romans, he stops writing. He needs a praise break. This is a doxology. Listen to his words. I can see with his quill he's writing and he stops and he's

just so overwhelmed with God's love that he says, "Oh the depth of the riches of the wisdom and knowledge of God." How unsearchable God's judgments and his path beyond tracing out. Who has known the mind of the Lord? Or who has been his counselor? Or who's ever given to God that God should repay him? For from him, through him, and to him are all things. So to him be the glory forever and ever. Amen. And this is when the Hallelujah chorus begins to sing. See in the book of Colossians, Paul is reminding us that as God's chosen people, which is quite remarkable, have you ever thought of yourself as being chosen by God? Because you are. Me too. As God's chosen people, holy, dearly loved, remember to clothe yourselves with compassion and kindness and humility and gentleness and patience. Christmas Eve is difficult for children, but there's something coming. So Peter encourages us to understand God's divine power by making every effort to add things to our faith. We have to add to our faith goodness. We have to add knowledge. We have to add self-control, perseverance and godliness and brotherly kindness and brotherly love.

In a book simply called Love, the author wrote these words. Lord my God, when your love spilled over into creation, you thought of me. Have you ever seen? Right from Genesis 1, in the beginning, before Adam and Eve came, even before Adam and Eve came. God thought of us. He knew when we were going to be born and he knows us now. Who knew that we were part of Adam and Eve? He chose us from the very beginning. Direct all this in me to word your praise, O God. Teach me reverence for every person and all things. Please energize me, I hope we can all say this, in your loving service. May nothing distract us from your love. It's true, Jesus is the reason for the season and all seasons throughout the year. Many citizens recognize Christians in the first century. They recognize them because they loved one another. They never failed to help widows. They freely gave. They made sure that brothers and sisters were loved and demonstrated and taken care of. And may that be the same for us. May your love at Christmas time overwhelm not only with you but all those around you. Merry Christmas.

## Song Leader

A dear friend of mine named Christa wrote the following message this week. It's days like today that I put my mind and my heart at ease as a mama. It was ugly sweater making day at before and after care. One little boy didn't have a plain sweater that his parents did not provide for him to decorate and he was crying. My daughter Charlotte gave up her sweater for him. At pickup her teacher told me how proud she was of Charlotte and that I had a wonderful and kind child. Nothing makes me happier. I wrote back when a young child views circumstances with kind empathetic eyes and responds with a gracious loving act. It reflects upon the behavior and attitudes of those closest to her. Well done Charlotte. Well done Christa. You see love is not something that you hold inside. Love is given. It's the greatest gift that you can give to others. Why? Because God's love has lifted us. Let's stand and sing.

## Closing

Hear the words of Zechariah modified on the occasion of the birth of John the Baptist. The first part is a praise to God and the second part I'm going to read as an instruction to us.

"Blessed be the Lord God of Israel,  
for he has visited and redeemed his people  
and has raised up a horn of salvation for us  
in the house of his servant David,  
as he spoke by the mouth of his holy prophets from of old,  
that we should be saved from our enemies

and from the hand of all who hate us;  
to show the mercy promised to our fathers  
and to remember his holy covenant,  
the oath that he swore to our father Abraham, to grant us  
that we, being delivered from the hand of our enemies,  
might serve him without fear,  
in holiness and righteousness before him all our days.

And you, child, will be called the prophet of the Most High;  
for you will go before the Lord to prepare his ways,  
to give knowledge of salvation to his people  
in the forgiveness of their sins,  
because of the tender mercy of our God,  
whereby the sunrise shall visit us from on high  
to give light to those who sit in darkness and in the shadow of death,  
to guide our feet into the way of peace.”  
Amen. Merry Christmas.

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