



Words of Advent

Week 4 - Love

John 1:14
1 John 4: 9-12

As we head towards the close of Advent and our time of waiting, we learn that the birth of Jesus brings us to understand that our worth comes from God rather than social status, wealth, or ambition. The anticipation of Christmas is exciting because it represents the culmination of all our deepest hearts' longings. Our hope for peace for ourselves and those around us. Our longing to live with joy despite the circumstances we face, but most of all our need for love. At its core, Advent revolves around love—the fulfilment of it. And yet, the challenge of this season is from living in a time of great division and distress. Around the globe the front line of conflict has moved everywhere: from the recent attacks in Manchester and Australia, to the wars in Ukraine, Gaza and Sudan, violence is rapidly spreading and growing more extreme by the month. There is much to be concerned about, but we are reminded that God's perfect agape (selfless, enduring) love casts out all fear (1 John 4: 18), extending beyond borders and identities. Enveloping all anxieties and trepidations resounding in the truth that these things will pass and goodness will prevail.

In Christina Rossetti's beautiful poem, "Love Came Down at Christmas Time," we are reminded that love comes into the world in the form of Jesus Christ. The poem highlights different dimensions of divine love, presenting it as the source of all other loves. In particular, it emphasises God's love for humanity. Through Christ, God reveals the true nature of divine love and provides us with a model for living in love. As Rossetti writes:

Love shall be our token,
 Love be yours and love be mine,
 Love to God and all men,
 Love for plea and gift and sign.

Jesus, the great 'I am', comes that all might have life more abundantly. (John 10:10). Advent invites us to be grateful for the love God gives through Jesus Christ. A love we share with our families and friends, while also reminding us of the void where love is absent. For many, it is a difficult time, a time of dread. The pain of previous years resurfaces. In these moments, grief can weigh heavily, stemming from human experiences marked by brokenness and estrangement. From the smallest child to the oldest adult, we all need love to thrive and flourish. God's love comes into play in various forms—within a family, a circle of friends, or even through the painful withholding of human love intended to punish or inflict hurt. Its constancy never changes, irrespective of circumstances.

The Gospel of John beautifully captures the love of God by recounting the story of Jesus as the Word made flesh. It explains that while John the Baptist served as a forerunner and witness to the Word of God, he was not the Word himself but came to proclaim it, assuring that all who believed would be welcomed as children of God.

No love compares to the Word made flesh. In Christ, love entered the world, illuminating our lives and inviting us to live through Him. The mystery of God has been made real for all of humanity, energising life and restoring hope through outrageous sacrificial love. A love that welcomes the vulnerable, embraces the stranger, comforts the lonely, and is mindful of those who feel forgotten. This love defines the Christian faith and our witness as followers of Christ. It moves us to imitate its persistent pursuit of everyone (even those who are most difficult to like—let alone love) and compels us to reach out to those who live with brokenness and who feel unworthy. We wait again for that complete fulfilment as He has promised.

Come, Lord Jesus. Amen! (Revelation 22:20)

Activity

As we approach Christmas, consider the real gift of love—the birth of a saviour — and how we might extend the knowledge of that gift to others, whether through tangible things or through less material means, such as our presence, purposeful prayer, or intentional acts of kindness. Reach out to someone who may be isolated or lonely; a simple phone call or suggestion of a coffee can make a world of difference.

Prayer

Merciful God, whose love knows no bounds, thank you for the love that came to us through the birth of Jesus Christ. Open our eyes and hearts to the movement of Your Spirit among all people and throughout creation. Help us to see as You see. Grant us the means to express the love of Christ in our everyday actions. Remind us that perfect love casts out all fear (1 John 4:18). Let our lives shine with your love and bring glory to Your matchless name, who is alive and reigns within us—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Amen.

May the light of Advent guide you, those you love and hope to love.

Canon Sharon



Then the angel showed me the river of the water of life, bright as crystal, flowing from the throne of God and of the Lamb through the middle of the street of the city. On either side of the river is the tree of life with its twelve kinds of fruit, producing its fruit each month; and the leaves of the tree are for the healing of the nations.

Revelation 22: 1-2 (NRSV)