

Fourth Advent - Love

Please pray with me. Creator and giver of life, thank you for all you give, and help us to be humble recipients. Amen.

Congratulations! You did it!

It was a little touch and go there for a bit, but, we did it!

Merry Christma....UGH

You know, Advent can feel like one of those dreams, where you think you're running as fast as you can, putting in all your effort, and it feels like you're barely moving. Just stuck in molasses.

What is the point!

I mean, haven't I worked hard enough yet? Haven't I waited long enough?

When is it Christmas? I was patient, I really was. And, I did all this work of making gifts for people. Not all of you, sorry, but there's far too many of you. But, seriously, when do I get my presents?! When is it my turn?! Isn't that what this whole thing is about?

Let's just sing a song, I don't know, maybe I can figure it out.

SONG: Come Thou Long Expected Jesus

Matthew 1:18-24

When Jesus' mother, Mary, was engaged to Joseph, but before they lived together, she was found to be pregnant through the Holy Spirit. Joseph, her husband, an upright person unwilling to disgrace her, decided to divorce her quietly.

This was Joseph's intention when suddenly the angel of God appeared in a dream and said, "Joseph, heir to the House of David, don't be afraid to wed Mary; it is by the Holy Spirit that she has conceived this child. She is to have a son, and you are to name him Jesus - 'Salvation' - because he will save the people from their sins." All this happened to fulfill what God has said through the prophet:

"The virgin will be with child
and give birth,
And the child will be named
Immanuel"

- A name that means "God is with us."

When Joseph awoke, he did as the angel of God had directed, and they went ahead with the marriage.

So, we are at the end of our story. Let's see what becomes of Morley's Christmas present making project.

Story

Candle Lighting

Reflection:

So, was my question answered? What is the point of all this?

I don't know if it's been explicitly said, but the story we've been listening to is literally called Christmas Presents. So let's look at the story. See if we can figure out the point.

Now that we've listened to the whole thing, I think one of the most important things about this story is what's not in it.

While we do mostly get to hear about how the gifts turned out, we only get to hear about one person actually getting their present. Morley. We don't get to hear Sam, Stefanie or Dave get theirs.

So, in some ways, this is a true Advent story. Stuart McLean mostly leaves us in the waiting.

This might feel a little unfair. We've just spent the last 4 weeks listening to this family struggle to make gifts for each other

and we don't even get to know how it went. Did Sam like his go cart? Did Dave maybe cry at the thoughtful picture? Does Stefanie ever wear the headband?

We don't get to hear about any of this because this is not a story about getting, it's a story about making, and giving.

Even more than that, it is about giving the best kinds of gifts. I don't mean that the best gifts are always homemade, but that the best gifts have something deeper to them. For the giver and the receiver.

At their best, gift giving is a tangible way that we show our love. Show that we care.

And so, this story is about how we show love to one another through gift giving. And, that love takes work.

One of my favourite things about this story is that it gives us a variety of examples, showing us different kinds of this work.

Sometimes that work is physical, and kind of unglamorous. Like Sam knitting. He just needs to put his head down and keep going, even if it means working late into the night the day before it needs to be done (Something I'm sure none of you are familiar with). And here we get a correction of sorts to Stuart's gendered comment about little boys not being

meaningful. I think Sam is putting a lot of himself into his gift for Stefanie. There's a lot of meaning there.

Morley also does something physical, building a chair, but she also needs to do the work of being able to listen to criticism and be flexible. She gets help from Dave, and that chair becomes a go cart, and, I'm willing to guess, becomes a wonderful gift.

We also hear that work can be emotional. Like Stefanie remembering a picture at her grandparents house, and making the connection between her father and brother. Seeing and understanding that beautiful echo.

Or sometimes that work is being observant. Something in other stories Dave rarely is. But here he sees how much work Morley has done, and he helps her to find one of those moments of peace.

We do mostly get to see the fruit of their labour, though we never hear how Sam's knitting turned out. But we hear about the go cart, the picture, and, of course, the tree. But none of that is the point.

This story helps us to see that love is about doing, not just feeling.

To quote a christian hip hop group from the early 90s, love is a verb. And gift giving can be a wonderful expression of that. Of doing the work of love.

One of my core beliefs is that our actions express who we are. And gift giving is a wonderful opportunity to do that.

Sometimes we do this as a school.

One example is the Christmas hampers. I hope you think about what it is you are actually doing when it comes to these hampers. It can be so easy for those of us with privilege to forget that not everyone has what we do. To share some of what we have with others can be an expression of love between our community and the families we connect with. With those around us experiencing difficult times.

Another example is secret santa. It isn't an accident that when you give each other your gifts we call it a circle of love.

But just giving something thoughtlessly isn't enough.

In my 38 years I've gotten a lot of plastic junk at Christmas. At the time, in the moment, I was excited to get the creepy crawlers bake oven. But I've come to realize that, honestly, I barely remember any of the things I got when I was a kid. What I remember are the times I felt that someone truly saw me. When someone gave me a gift that showed they had

taken the time to understand me. Like when my sister-in-law hand stitched a notebook cover, so I could have someplace beautiful to do my writing.

This is gift giving at its best.

But, before we can take our cues from Stuart McLean and do the work of showing love, and all this beautiful gift giving. We gotta wait just a little bit longer.

Song: Come All Ye Faithful

Thanks for waiting with me. Amen. Go with love.