

Sermon: Real Love because Jesus is coming  
Trinity  
24 December 2023

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[Luke 1:26-38 and 1 John 4: 7-12](#)

The Fourth Sunday in Advent.



Songs: Away in a manger: [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AnwO\\_0DrpCk](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AnwO_0DrpCk)  
How deep the Father's love for us: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SKDujimtyAVk>

**INTRODUCTION.** The word “Advent” essentially means “coming” and “expecting”. We are in the Advent Season: Expecting Christmas, expecting Jesus Christ.

During the four Sundays before Christmas – we remember that Jesus came to our world as a babe, and that he will return to our world on the Day of the Lord. Each Sunday with a distinct traditional theme.

**A. It is a time for hope, as we look forward to the day when Jesus will return.** “Yes, I am coming soon.” (Revelation 22:20).

**B. It is a time to seek peace with God and each other.** “Peace, I leave with you; my peace I give you. I do not give to you as the world gives.” (John 14:27).

**C. It is a time to be filled with joy.** Because as foretold in the passage from Luke to be read for us this morning God became a man and was born as a baby on that first Christmas Day, to become our Redeemer and King!

**D. Ultimately, it is a time for love.** Because God is love. And this is our focus this morning, the day before we celebrate the birth of Jesus.

We remember during Advent the promise of Jesus that He will come again to create a new heaven and earth in which we will live for all eternity!

*This expectation inspires us to have hope, peace, joy and love in our lives, our churches, and our world!*

During the four Advent Sundays before Christmas day, we remember the words of Paul:<sup>1</sup>

*“God made him who had no sin, to be sin for us so that in him, we might become the righteousness of God.”*

This is what Christ did for us on that first Christmas day. In taking on “*weak human flesh*”, he associated himself with us, our mistakes, disobedience, and sin. He came to live the life that God requires, and we cannot accomplish, and lived it perfectly, with holiness, and without sin, in our place!

The Son of God became our brother and will never leave nor forsake us.

During the Season of Advent, we celebrate that when God gave the gift of salvation, he did not send new laws and rules through which to figure out how we can be saved. No, he sent his Son to save us.

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<sup>1</sup> 2 Corinthians 5: 21

Let us renew our trust in Jesus. Let us rejoice because he did everything we could not do, to save us! Let's pray that he will come back soon to dry all our tears and grant us his complete peace and joy.

Let's wait with the same urgent hope and love of the believers in the New Testament Church for the victorious and conquering return of Christ, our King.

The progressive lighting of one more candle every Advent Sunday symbolizes the hope, peace, joy, and love *surrounding our Lord's first coming into the world and the anticipation of his second coming to judge the living and the dead.*

The lighting of candles during this Season signifies Christ, the Light of the world.

*"Darkness cannot drive out darkness, only light can do that.  
Hate cannot drive out hate, only love can do that."<sup>2</sup>*

Fourth Advent Sunday. We now light this candle—the Candle of Love, symbolizing our longing to celebrate the birth of Christ and our expectation of Christ's return, symbolizing the amazing love of God shown through the birth, ministry, death, and resurrection of Jesus.

**Prayer: Father God bless our worship today on this fourth Sunday in Advent, when we remember the angel Gabriel's proclamation that Your love for the world would be revealed in a Child that would be born to a young virgin – the handmaiden of the Lord. From Jesus, the One who came into the world on that first Christmas Day, we learn the extent of Your love and we also learn that all of us are Your children loved unconditionally by You. Loving God, while we wait for Christ's return, help us to be in awe because Your love for each of us knows no bounds. May this love be mirrored in all aspects of our lives as we share it with others when we celebrate Christmas. And as we worship today, let us share in Your love. In Jesus' name. Amen.**

## **MESSAGE.**

In the passage read for us from the gospel of Luke, we heard about the foretelling of the birth of Jesus. Mary receiving the news that she would give birth to a son, a son to be called Jesus.

*"He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High. The Lord God will give him the throne of his father David, and he will reign over Jacob's descendants forever; his kingdom will never end."*

And having received this news Mary replies in complete trust and obedience:

*"I am the Lord's servant," Mary answered. "May your word to me be fulfilled."*

Tomorrow we will celebrate that birth!

But this morning I want us to focus on the passage from 1 John 4. This is a letter written by the apostle John towards the end of his life. He was the only one of the disciples that was not martyred. He spent the last years of his life in Ephesus. It is accepted that this letter was written to the believers in that area. It doesn't mention any individuals by name or the place where they lived.

John's readers were confronted with an early form of Gnostic teaching which held that spirit was entirely good, but that matter, including man's body, was entirely evil. This teaching held that salvation was the escape from the body, which was achieved not by faith in Christ, but by special knowledge. Christ's true humanity was denied.

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<sup>2</sup> Martin Luther King Jnr

John wrote this letter with two basic purposes in mind. The first was to expose false teachers.<sup>3</sup> The second was to give believers the assurance of salvation.<sup>4</sup>

His concluding remarks in chapter 5 are important because John explains his reason for writing this letter:<sup>5</sup>

*“I write these things to you who believe in the name of the Son of God, so that you may know that you have eternal life.”*

John writes to exclude any uncertainty. He doesn't write to:

*“... you who believe in the name of the Son of God so that you **might** have eternal life or could **possibly** have eternal life”. He writes these things, “so that you may **know** that you have eternal life”.*

And he confirms what we are to **know**.

We are to **know** that God hears us.

We are to **know** that anyone born of God does not continue to sin.

We are to **know** that we are children of God.

We are to **know** that the Son of God has come and has given us understanding so that we may **know** him who is true.

Mark Driscoll writes<sup>6</sup> that the “*entirety of his letter can be broken down into three categories that are helpful for determining whether or not you are a Christian.*” John wanted his readers to consider this and to examine their own lives. He writes that a Christ follower will experience transformation in how they think, act, and relate. The three categories are:

1. **Believe:** Your beliefs change. Do you believe Jesus is the eternal God who became a man to die for your sins?
2. **Behave:** Your lifestyle changes. Do you admit you are a sinner, and you want to stop sinning and live a holy life like Jesus?
3. **Belong:** Your relationships change. Do you receive God's love and in response love him and other Christians?

John starts this letter setting out his authority to make the statements, and to draw the conclusions, that he does.

He starts off by pointing out that he is writing about that:

*“... which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked at and our hands have touched.”*

He is proclaiming about Jesus as the son of God, the Word of life.

He goes on to write:

*“The life (Christ) appeared, we have seen it and testified to it, and we proclaim to you the eternal life, which was with the Father and has appeared to us.”*

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<sup>3</sup> 1 John 4:26

<sup>4</sup> 1 John 4:13.

<sup>5</sup> 1 John 5:13.

<sup>6</sup> [0000004645-pages \(realfaith.com\)](https://www.realfaith.com/0000004645-pages)

This is not speculation. This is not hearsay evidence. This is firsthand evidence from a witness who was there, who lived with Jesus, who spoke to Jesus, ate with Jesus, and touched the hands of Jesus.

John emphasises that the believers are to have a true and proper understanding of the fact that Jesus was fully human and fully God. And he emphasises both God's character as love, and the love that we are to have for our fellow believers and those around us.<sup>7</sup>

The centrepiece of verses 7-12 is that *"God is love"*. The word love appears 13 times in these six verses consisting of 128 words. Every 10<sup>th</sup> word is "love" or "loved".

John writes that God showed his love.

Andries in his blog puts it like this:<sup>8</sup>

*"The Biblical understanding of love is that it is shown in actions. It is not so much what we feel, as what we do that is important when we try to understand what love is."*

It is not possible to know that someone loves you, unless they express this in words, or by their actions.

The father in the parable of the prodigal son expressed his love in actions.

*"But while he (the son) was still a long way off, his father saw him, and was filled with compassion for him, he ran to his son, threw his arms around him and kissed him."*<sup>9</sup>

We know that God loves us because we know what he did for us. We were created to have fellowship with him, and when we strayed, he saved us.

And God so loved the world that he sent Jesus so that whoever believes in him will not perish but will be saved to eternal life.<sup>10</sup>

"God is a verb" wrote Buckminster Fuller in a poem "No more Secondhand God. And what is a verb? A verb is a word that shows action.

Fuller wrote this:<sup>11</sup>

"Here is God's purpose-  
for God, to me, it seems,  
is a verb  
not a noun,  
proper or improper;  
is the articulation  
not the art, objective or subjective;  
is loving,  
not the abstraction "love" commanded or entreated;  
is knowledge dynamic,  
not legislative code,  
not proclamation law.  
not academic dogma, not ecclesiastic canon.  
Yes, God is a verb,  
the most active,

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<sup>7</sup> The letter proposes two tests. The first referred to as the Christological tests focused on the believers understanding of Jesus as the Son of God. The second referred to as the ethical tests focused on how the believers conduct themselves in their relationship with God, and their brothers and sisters.

<sup>8</sup> [Fourth Advent Sunday: Contemplate love! \(pastoral.co.za\)](https://www.pastoral.co.za)

<sup>9</sup> Luke 15:20

<sup>10</sup> John 3:16.

<sup>11</sup> <https://www.wisdom2be.com/gems-poetry-wisdomstories/no-more-second-hand-god-by-buckminster-fuller>

connoting the vast harmonic  
reordering of the universe  
from unleashed chaos of energy.

In Exodus 3 Moses asks God, what am I to say when the Israelites ask me what your name is?

God said to Moses, "I AM WHO I AM. Say that I AM has sent me to you."

Just two words. A pronoun and a verb.

*"By using the word "AM" God is using a form of the verb "to be." In English this verb is unique; it is different from other verbs. Others have the typical three or four forms (for example, walk(s), walked, walking). But "to be" has eight: is, am, are, was, were, be, been, being. To recognize "AM" as different from all other verbs is to acknowledge God as a distinctive and unique being."<sup>12</sup>*

Hold onto this that God is a verb. God's love is put into action. We are called to do the same.

Because love comes from God, we are to love one another.

Jesus proclaimed this:

*"By this shall all men and women know that you are my disciples, that you have love one for another."<sup>13</sup>*

You are to love in response to what God has done for you. And what has God done?

*"This is how God showed his love among us: He sent his one and only Son into the world that we might live through Him."<sup>14</sup>*

We don't change how we believe, behave, and belong in order to earn God's love. It is as we come to understand and to own God's love, revealed in action, for us that we are transformed.

It is as we see the 'prodigal father', kicking off his sandals and running towards us with arms open to embrace us, that we know that God is love!

Mark Driscoll writes:

*"... these changes (to our belief, behaviour and belonging) start to occur in our life as the Holy Spirit begins a change process at our deepest levels of being. This is what John means in 1 John 3:24 when he says, "Whoever keeps his commandments abides in God, and God in him. And by this we know that he abides in us, by the Spirit whom he has given us."<sup>15</sup>*

*"24 Those who obey God's commandments remain in fellowship with him, and he with them. And we know he lives in us because the Spirit he gave us lives in us."<sup>15</sup>*

Upon the first Sunday of this Advent season Andries spoke about us being pilgrims on our journey of faith. The picture he gave us was that of the Jewish pilgrims making their way up to Jerusalem for the great feasts singing the beautiful Psalms of Ascent.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> [God is a verb - Christian Leader \(christianleadermag.com\)](http://christianleadermag.com)

<sup>13</sup> John 13:35

<sup>14</sup> 1 John 4:9.

<sup>15</sup> "From the New Living Translation.

<sup>16</sup> The Psalms of Ascent are a collection of 15 psalms (Psalms 120-134) in the Book of Psalms. These psalms were sung by Jewish pilgrims as they travelled up to Jerusalem for the great feasts. The Hebrew term for these psalms is "ma'alot," which means "going up". The psalms are also known as the Song of Degrees, the Pilgrim Songs, and the Gradual Psalms

Each of us, as pilgrims are at a different point on the road to our destination of eternal life. Learning and sharing as we walk upwards. Reinforcing and expanding what we believe, informing the way we behave, and transforming the way we fulfill our role as children of God, and brothers/sisters to our fellow believers, changing our relationships – our belonging.

This Advent season has been an important part of that pilgrimage. As we have moved towards the day of remembering, and celebrating, the birth of Jesus.

So, the call to each one of us is not just to be a little more compassionate at this time of Christmas, or to be a little less irritated with those around us at this time of Christmas, but to examine our belief, our behaviour, and are belonging.

You enlarge your understanding of your belief when you are in church worshipping on a Sunday. When we pray together, sing together, and share thoughts on God's Word. You do so when you are in discussion with fellow believers, whether in a fellowship group, Bible study, or sharing a cup of tea or coffee. You do so by reading the Bible and the writings of those who commentate on the Bible and our Christian life.

Your behaviour changes as you move off centre stage and place God at the centre. This allows us to love our brothers and sisters, and to act towards our neighbours in a way in which we would have them act towards us. This means not just thinking about loving them but moving into action.

*"5 Let your gentle spirit [your graciousness, unselfishness, mercy, tolerance, and patience] be known to all people."<sup>17</sup>*

Your relationship (belonging) with God and those around you will change and grow as well. This will happen as you put into action, and exercise, your real love following the example of Jesus.

Let living with hope, peace, joy, and love be a daily way of life as your pilgrimage continues ever onward and ever upwards.

We are your servants Lord, and as Mary answered, "May your word to us be fulfilled."

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<sup>17</sup> Philippians 4:5 Amplified Bible.