

## **Advent Part Four**

*John 1:14*

1. Love pitched a tent.
2. Love has a face...
3. Love lights our darkness.
4. Love invites us in.
5. Love calls us to love.

love.learn.live.  
westvalleychurch.com



West Valley Church  
December 21, 2025  
Michael W. O'Neill

## **Advent: Hope of All The Earth<sup>1</sup>**

### **Part Four: Love**

Today is the fourth Sunday of Advent – the last Sunday before our Christmas Eve service and Christmas Day. On the first three Sundays, we focused on the themes of hope, peace, and joy, and how, because of Christ, each of these can be always present in our lives regardless of the circumstances we may find ourselves in. Today, we look at what the Bible calls the greatest of all: love.

“Love can feel like something that just happens to us. People talk about ‘falling in love’ or chasing it as a way to feel whole. Songs say, ‘love is all you need,’ (feeling like it is) a path to personal fulfillment. But Advent points us to a deeper kind of love – not accidental or self-focused, but steady, costly, and others-centered.”<sup>2</sup> What we call love today and what the Bible calls love are not necessarily the same thing. Our word “love” can be confusing. “You can love your mom, and you can love pizza. But if the word ‘love’ means the same thing in both of those cases, your mom’s going to feel real bad.”<sup>3</sup>

So we’re going to get a better understanding of love today. I am also praying that we will experience this love, be changed by this love, and be determined to live this love when we leave here today. We’ll see this from the Scripture passage in our Advent devotional reading for today in John 1:14. This verse is describing Jesus to us, and it says:

“The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the one and only Son, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth.” (John 1:14, niv)

Let me tell you, the reason we journey through the Advent season and the reason why we celebrate Christmas – it’s all wrapped around a mystery so profound that mere words can’t even carry the weight of it: *God became human*. Not distant, not abstract, not unreachable, but present, touchable, and very, very near. “The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us.” At the heart of this miracle of all miracles, this source of *all* miracles in our lives, the heart of this miracle is one simple and profound truth: love.

The incredible truth of that single verse is that Love itself came near...

---

<sup>1</sup> Resources include: David Glimour, *Hope of all the Earth*, The Foundry, 2025  
*Hope of all the Earth* Pastor’s resource, The Foundry, 2025

<sup>2</sup> Bible Project, *Agape – Love*, Devotional: *Anticipating Christmas: And Advent Overview*, Bible.com.

<sup>3</sup> *ibid*

## 1. Love pitched a tent.

The eternal God stepped into time and “made his dwelling among us.” That’s a pretty poetic way to say it, but the original language is more real and down in the dirt with us than that. You could say it means that he “made his home with us,” but even that could mean a lot of things to a lot of people. With that, you might think it means he built his half million-dollar house in the neighborhood, or that he moved into a condo up the street. But the original language is grittier than that; the original language could be translated to say he “pitched his tent” with us. God himself camps out with us.

This is love that does not stay at a distance. This is love that *moves toward* the beloved – that’s you.

This shouldn’t be a surprise. God has been saying this all throughout Scripture. In Psalm 34:18 he tells us that “God is near to the brokenhearted.” God promised through the Prophet Isaiah that “The Lord himself will give you a sign: The virgin will conceive and give birth to a son, and will call him ‘Immanuel’ (which means, ‘God with us’)” (Isaiah 7:14, Matthew 1:28, niv).

The God of the universe chose not to shout his love from the heavens but to step into our world – our dirty streets, our limitations, our sorrows, our joys, our grief, our celebrations.

Our tendency is to withdraw and isolate ourselves, to keep our guard up to protect ourselves, but Christmas tells us that love always moves *closer*, not farther away. God came close – close enough to be held by human hands, close enough to feel human pain, close enough to walk the roads we walk, to camp out with us.

In the words of one writer, “on that night so long ago, the tiny baby, wrapped by Mary in swaddling clothes, waving little arms, hungrily sucking a fist, was like any other newborn baby. He was helpless and dependent, and Mary was His hope of survival, His nourishment, His very lifeline. God entrusted His most priceless gift to a very human, very young, earthly mother. Why? Because God so loved--that He gave. He relinquished His hold on His Son and placed Him in fragile human arms.”<sup>4</sup>

God with us. Love with us.

And that means that...

## 2. Love has a face...

Through Jesus, they could look directly into the face of God.

There is no shortage of paintings of Jesus. Countless artists across the centuries have depicted him, from early iconography to famous Renaissance works like da Vinci's *Last Supper*, to modern interpretations. Estimates suggest hundreds of thousands or even millions of artistic representations globally, but that’s only a

---

<sup>4</sup> Janet Oke in “Reflections on the Christmas Story.” *Christianity Today*, Vol. 39, no. 14.

fraction of what we know from the ones that are historically famous or widely reproduced. You can find images of Jesus as everything from a pale white European to what looks like a California surfer dude. I saw one painting that looked like a mid-western high school senior picture from the fifties more than a middle-eastern rugged carpenter and itinerant teacher from the first century. Just about every culture and ethnicity has paintings of Jesus in their native skin color. So what do I mean when I say that love has a face? If you could look into his face, John tells us in that verse that what you will see is that he is “full of grace and truth.” Real love always takes shape; it is always visible by what it does. Scripture shows again and again that God’s love is not abstract; you can *see* it – it is proven true by what it does. Romans 5:8 says:

“God showed his great love for us by sending Christ to die for us while we were still sinners.” (Romans 5:8, nlt)

In John’s first letter he tells us:

“This is how we know what love is (*or ‘this is how we know love when we see it’*): Jesus Christ laid down his life for us.” (1 John 3:16a, niv)

In Jesus, grace took on a face.

In Jesus, truth learned to walk on two human feet.

In Jesus, the heart of God became readable for all people.

Christmas teaches us that love is never just an emotion or a concept.

Love *becomes*.

Love *acts*.

Love *shows up*.

Love *lights up*.

You can’t miss this love when you see it, because...

### **3. Love lights our darkness.**

Jesus didn’t come into a perfect world; He came into a broken one. He was born under Roman oppression, into poverty, into a family with no place to stay. From the very start, God’s love chose to **enter** our darkness rather than avoid it. Jesus didn’t avoid the darkness; he invaded it. In Luke’s Gospel we’re told that Jesus was born in poverty (Luke 2:7). In Matthew 2:16 we’re reminded that Jesus entered a world of oppression and violence (Matthew 2:16). Just a few verses before our Scripture for today, in verse five of John 1, we are told that Jesus “the light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it.” There is no darkness in this world – no place of sadness, no place of darkest grief, there is no place of the worst evil in the world that Jesus won’t walk into and none of it can overcome Jesus. He is the light that is greater than any darkness.

Jesus isn't just a metaphorical candle in the darkness; it means that he steps into the dark places of your life too. The places of pain, the places of shame, the places of confusion and loss. That's why Isaiah promised that the arrival of Jesus would mean:

"The people walking in darkness have seen a great light." (Isaiah 9:2)

From the very start, God's love chose to enter our darkness rather than avoid it.

Because love does not run from hard places; love goes where it is needed most.

For the lonely, the arrival of Jesus says:

"I will never leave you nor forsake you." (Matthew 28:20b)

For the grieving, Scripture says:

"He is acquainted with sorrow." (Isaiah 53:3)

For the guilty or ashamed:

"There is now no condemnation for those in Christ Jesus." (Romans 8:1)

For those carrying loneliness this Christmas, the arrival of Jesus says: *God is with you.*

For those carrying grief, it says: *God understands your sorrow.*

For those carrying sin or shame, it says: *God has come to redeem you, not reject you.*

Love came down into the darkness so that darkness would not have the final word.

This love of God in Jesus invades our darkness, but then doesn't leave us in the dark. He calls us out of the darkness into his light. The Apostle Peter said that he "called you out of darkness into his wonderful light." (1 Peter 2:9, niv)

His...

#### **4. Love invites us in.**

John says, "we have seen His glory." We might see that and think it's similar to the blinding, frightening light of the angels who appeared to the shepherds, but the glory of Christ is not a frightening light that pushes us away; it is a welcoming light that *draws us in*.

Jesus did not come to frighten us off or push humanity away but to draw us in close to his love. That's exactly why he said:

"Come to me, all of you who are weary and carry heavy burdens, and I will give you rest." (Matthew 11:28, nlt)

And in John 8 Jesus said:

"I am the light of the world. If you follow me, you won't have to walk in darkness, because you will have the light that leads to life." (John 8:12, nlt)

That's the reason Jesus entered our world. John 3:16-17 says:

“For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life. (*Many of us are familiar with that verse. But here’s the very next line.*) For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him. (John 3:16-17, niv)

Christmas is God saying:

“You are not forgotten.  
You are not abandoned.  
You are not unlovable.  
Come and see My glory; see my face—My grace, My truth, My love—offered freely to you.”

We celebrate Christmas not just because Christ came into our world, but because He invites us to come to Him, to enter into this love and be changed.

*Prayer*

If God’s love became flesh, then *our love* must become visible as well—visible in kindness, visible in forgiveness, visible in compassion, visible in generosity, visible in presence.

## **5. Love calls us to love.**

Love, by its nature, is compelling. It compels us to reciprocate and multiply. This love that has moved into our neighborhood, that camps out with us, that has a face and lights our darkness and invites us in – this love changes us, changes our lives, and calls us to love in return.

When Jesus was asked what the greatest commandment in the law was, he was quick to answer:

“‘Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.’ This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: ‘Love your neighbor as yourself.’” (Matthew 22:37-39, niv)

Basically, Jesus was asked, “which is more important – to love God or to love your neighbor?” Jesus’ answer was, “Yes.” To ask the question means you don’t get the point; they are two sides of the same coin. Your love for God is expressed by your love for people, and your love for people is expressed by your love for God.

Since we have received love, the greatest and only thing we can do is love God in return and love others.

If the Word became flesh, then the church must do the same. Our faith must become flesh—embodied, practical, lived. This is exactly what the Bible means when it says:

“Follow God’s example, therefore, as dearly loved children and walk in the way of love, just as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us as a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God.” (Ephesians 5:1-2, niv)

The evidence that we have accepted the love of God is that we love him in return, and the evidence that we love him in return is that we love people, which is why the Bible says:

“Dear children, let us not love with words or speech but with actions and in truth.” (1 John 3:18, niv)

Love is evidenced by action; love calls us to love. Which is exactly what Jesus meant when he said:

“As the Father has sent me, I am sending you.” (John 20:21, niv)

This is not an easy thing to do, even for a pastor sometimes. Over 25 years ago, when I was a pastor in Idaho, we had a nice older lady in our church who always seemed to be looking out for me and my family. She especially always encouraged me to protect my time with my family – our three boys were very little at that time. She would lovingly tell me to make sure and take my day off and not let anyone interrupt that time with them.

There was just one problem: she had a habit of coming over to my house regularly to tell me these things – and usually she would do it when she knew she could catch me, which was...on my day off. She would come to my house, on my day off, to tell me to protect my day off.

So one day I said to her, “Thank you for the ways you encourage me and hold me accountable to protect my family time. But could I ask a favor? Unless it is an emergency, could you please not come to my house on my day off?” Seemed reasonable to me. But not to her. She became very angry; she left the church and told people she was “shaking the dust from her feet”. We were a church of about 400 people in a town of 5,000, so word traveled fast. She started telling people that the church was cursed and I was an evil person.

Several months later, we were re-roofing the church, and in between the shingles being off the roof and putting the new ones on, we had a sudden storm with torrential rainfall that ended up doing a lot of water damage to the church. So she began telling people that this was God’s judgement against me and the church.

Well, a short while later at her house, apparently an appliance shorted out, and this woman’s house caught fire, and large parts of their second floor burned...

When I learned this, I thought about how God said that after the flood he would no longer use rain to judge the earth, but it does say a lot about fire...

So I asked my wife, Shelly, if I should drop by that lady’s house to remind her of that. Shelly said, “You’ll do nothing of the sort. We are going to go buy groceries and deliver them to her house.” Between the two suggestions, guess which one we did? Guess who’s was the right one?

Love isn’t love unless it’s in action, and often it shows up best when we love in ways that our nature says we don’t want to.

Here's the cool thing about this love: the more we do it, the easier it gets. After we delivered those groceries, it was much easier for me to pray for that lady and to want the best for her – to not speak ill of her and to actually be happy to see her – even if she didn't want to see me. (I'm so thankful for my wife!)

This Christmas, may we ask:

What does love look like in my home?

In my church?

Toward my neighbor, my enemy, the stranger?

What would it mean for my love to take on flesh?

The world does not need more theories about love; it needs Christians who live love with grace and truth, just as Christ did.

*Prayer*

*Benediction:*

May the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all. (2 Corinthians 13:14, nlt)