

St. David's Presbyterian Church
St. John's, NL
"Love 24/7"
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It's hard to feel the love we need in this season. The intensity of the gift giving and what I call being mauled by the mall tend to overshadow the quiet message which remains the same year after year, month after month, day after day, moment by moment. Whenever we have the ears to hear, we can hear the love of the Lord.

There is so much to do, so many places to visit, family to enjoy and endure, depending on the moment. There is lots of traveling, lots of eating, lots of talking, lots of music, lots of everything, too much of everything, so much that it is hard to hear the still small voice of love. This voice of love is constantly broadcasting on every channel of the human heart, 24 hours a day, seven days a week. There is no question about the fact of the broadcast, the question posed is addressed to our receiving the broadcast. Most of us spend incredible energy on the gift-giving. Some of us spend time making sure we get the exercise we need, so that our physical health will continue. Few of us spend time and energy listening to the broadcast.

I don't pretend that I listen enough. I'm busy and am more likely to turn on the radio and TV more frequently than to simply be quiet and listen to the one station that makes a difference in my life, and yours. Because when we operate out of the knowledge and experience of the love of God, the acceptance, the peace, the belonging, the purposefulness, our lives are different, changed, transformed by the One whose season we celebrate now. When we miss the love, we go looking in other places to fill the hole of our neediness. Many of us often go to the dark places of addictions and dysfunctions. Our brokenness becomes clear when we are not receiving and giving from a place of love. This is true even in our gift exchanges. Have you ever received a gift from someone who didn't really want to give it to you? What was that like? Confusing, I imagine, at best.

But God gives out of the immensity of His love, generosity and resources. At least a couple of times he asked the kings of Israel what they wanted to have, anything they wanted. This reminds me of when my father and I went grocery shopping. It didn't happen that often. But he would say to me, "Put whatever you want into the cart." And he meant it. Now I remember when

Mom and I went grocery shopping, she had clipped the coupons, was looking for the best buys, and was basically telling me “no” when I asked for something special. But when I shopped in that grocery store with Dad, it was “put whatever you want in the cart.” Now I suppose I didn’t go nuts and have some kind of literally filling the cart with toys kind of frenzy. But I did get things that mom would not have allowed me. It’s my best picture for the generosity of God. He asked these kings of old, put whatever you want in the cart.

Solomon asked for wisdom and understanding so that he could wisely lead the people. And God not only granted that desire, but also put riches and victory over his enemies and power in the cart as well. Ahaz, on the other hand, chose not to ask for anything. We read his story in Isaiah 7. Imagine God asking you to ask for anything, and what does King Ahaz choose? Nothing. It was a slap in God’s face. So God in his ultimate creativity says, “You know what, here’s what I’m going to do...a virgin will conceive and give birth to a son and a whole relationship with humanity will begin because of it.” That’s a summary of what He said in my words.

Historically, Isaiah was also prophesying that everything that the Northern kingdom of Israel was worried about regarding the Assyrian empire conquering and deporting the people of Israel would be long over by the time this Immanuel was a little boy. In fact, Assyrian and Babylon would be nothing by then. Time-wise, Isaiah was born around 740 BC. The fall of the northern kingdom occurred in 722 BC. The fall of the Assyrian and Babylonian empires occurring in the seventh and sixth centuries BC would be completely overshadowed by the birth of the Messiah several hundred years later. Even the mighty Roman empire was upstaged by this event that God himself had planned. No empire, not even the present American one can compare to this single event, when “God with us” (that’s what Immanuel means) was born.

In line with God’s character, He once again took the quiet way, using ordinary people, doing extraordinary and miraculous work. God sent the angel to Mary to explain what He had planned and she said “yes” to his plans. Mary told her betrothed fiancé, which was much more than today’s engagement. Even though there would have not been any sexual relations, the promise was strong enough that they would be called husband and wife at this point, and would even have to get a divorce to break off the relationship legally at this time.

So even though Mary had said “yes” to God, she still had to deal with her husband. All Joseph knew at this point was that she was pregnant, and that he was not the father. Therefore, he figured she had been with someone else and that he would quietly divorce her and she could go to be with the one with whom she had chosen to have the baby. This verse has spawned countless plays and dramas. We don't know all the details. But Mary would have certainly been devastated at this point, if she knew what he was planning to do. So God intervened and sent a messenger (an angel) to Joseph while he was dreaming. He took the dream seriously. He even named the child according to what was revealed to him in the dream.

Now you have to understand two things that were going on in naming the child. Most of us today get a baby name book and decide what we think sounds nice. More importantly in the biblical times was what the name means. Joseph named the child “*Yeshua*,” which we would translate today as Joshua. More importantly it means, “The Lord saves.” This summarizes Jesus' life. Now in Greek, *Yeshua* is translated as *Iesus*, or Jesus. And since the common language of commerce at the time, the lingua franca, was Greek, the New Testament writers call him Jesus, and so do we. The other name spoken in prophecy by Isaiah was Immanuel or Emmanuel. The meaning of this name is correctly explained by Matthew as “God with us.” Although there were no middle names given, we could say that this name was simply a way of encapsulating who Jesus was. And the name commonly used to refer to our Lord, Jesus Christ, is not showing a family name or last name. It is the office of the Lord as Messiah, anointed one, which again we have translated into Greek as *Christos*, or Christ. We would probably say “Jesus the Christ,” or “Jesus the Messiah.” This is because it is the way we would address the One who fulfilled all the Hebrew Scriptures' prophecies, the One who would save Israel once and for all and inaugurate a new era.

As you know, in Scripture, there are numerous names for Jesus, although Jesus Christ is the name for this One we celebrate. On Christmas Eve, we read from Isaiah 9, which says, “And he will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.” John calls him the Alpha and Omega, the Morning Star, the Lamb of God, the Way, the Truth, the Life, the I am, the Good Shepherd, the Resurrection and the Life, the Gate, the Word. These names are all appropriate for the One who we know as the source of Love.

Unfortunately today Jesus Christ is perhaps used more often in cursing than in praise and worship. This is what I remember growing up, even though I grew up in the church. I remember this to be true at school as well. I always wondered why people didn't say "O Buddha," "O Mohammed," or "O Krishna" or any of these others. Could it be that there is power in this name making it unlike any other name?

We believe there is power in the name of Jesus. This season which we celebrate is his. The wonder of his love, his vulnerability, his tenderness comes nearest during this physically darkest time of the year.

Once again at the Lord's Table, you are invited to receive the full extent of the love of Jesus Christ. You are reminded here that His love for you caused him to give his life for you. You are invited to experience here the fullness of his acceptance and forgiveness for all your sins. You can in this simple meal, in this Holy Sacrament, experience the hope, peace, joy and love that Jesus alone can give you.

Come to the One we celebrate this season and this day.

Let us pray.