

First Lesson: 2 Samuel 7:1-11, 16
Second Lesson: Romans 16:25-27
The Gospel: Luke 1:26-38

Fourth Sunday of Advent
December 20, 2020

Love
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American Lutheran Church of Sun City

Grace and peace be to you through our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen

Love, falling in love, being raised in love by your parents, experiencing the love of creation when you see the beauty of looking out at the desert vistas or the mountains. This world is full of love; yes we know that there are places where love is absent, but we are the people, no matter where we go there is love with us.

I've been having fun teasing James, our wonderful organist and coordinator of worship. I've been teasing about different modern songs to express the Gospel message love and so I said, "How about if we use *Love the One You're With* by Steven Stills". He looked at me he said, "That song is all about settling, about just loving somebody you're with. It's not appropriate." I'm going to redeem that song, at least this part of the song, love the one you're with, and what I mean by that is God's love is present in our heart through the gift of the Holy Spirit. In our baptisms, Christ's presence through the Holy Spirit in our life, love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, mind and strength because God is with us, because God is with us. Love the one you're with - is love God.

Wherever you go, if God is your King, wherever you go is the Kingdom of God and so there is a wonderful sense of security here. It also frees us to love the ones we are with - our family, our co-workers, our community. Strangers themselves loving the one we're with. The Holy Spirit loving the one we're with, the people that God has placed in our life and do not forget the last part of love as you love your neighbor, love yourself. You are dearly loved, make no doubt about it. You are loved for who you are, for you are God's child. It has nothing to do with performance, has nothing to do with the ways of the world, it is the most beautiful love, unconditional love, love expressed through Jesus Christ.

In this Christmas season we love to look back and recall the birth of the child Jesus the Christ. It is an important time for us to understand that the love in which he was brought into this world with Mary and Joseph and the power of the Holy Spirit is the same love that God has for us. This love that is excelling it is such a beautiful concept, so this encouragement now for the remainder of this message is it is a love story of hope, peace and joy that we express, and the magnificat that we read earlier. My soul proclaims the greatness of God. The word proclaim can be also use the word magnifies. I remember hearing that when I was a younger child that was the addition that I understood magnifies and I was always thinking about this a magnifier is like there's something small and I use with some level of skill, sometimes not, but trying to find this small little thing. It's not what it is about magnifies the Lord's love it is the Lord's love is so incredibly expansive; our soul magnifies, sees the incredible depth and breadth of God's love so the magnification is not trying to find something small, it is our lives being magnified to express this amazing love. It is a statement of faith that God loves us. God loves you. God loves this church. God loves this community. God loves the Grand Canyon Synod. God loves this world.

Mother Teresa, I'm going to make her an honorary Lutheran today. Saint Teresa had beautiful statements about love. If you recall, her life was about love, expressed in the most humble of places. She said this, "I am a little pencil in the hand of a writing God who is sending a love letter to the world. Wonderful, little, and yet, writing this love letter, she continued, "Prayer is action through love, but love in action is service." Prayer related to love, but love related to service. A rhythm of life and she of course has passed on now with the Lord, but she said this beautiful statement "At the hour of death when we come face to face with God, we are going to be judged on love, not how much we've done, but how much love we've put into doing." Isn't that thing so beautiful, the way she describes it, little acts done with great love. That's something each one of us can do.

We are not put in any position besides this, that God loves us and we're free to respond. The Gospel text says it this way, "Greetings favored one." The angel saying to Mary, "The Lord is with you," and the

immediate response is being perplexed, like what is this about? I love that phrase, "Do not be afraid" it's all throughout the scriptures, but that response is the same way for you and me. You could say it this way "Greetings favored one, the Lord is with you" and often when that message is given we are perplexed, but it is the statement **do not be afraid**. When we hear this love and the Lord's invitation into sharing love, we can often discount it. How can this be since I am a *fill in the blank*, for her, a virgin; for me, too old; or for someone else, too many experiences; or for someone else, I don't have the time. Whatever it is, this response that God's grace comes upon us. We are perplexed. We're told not to be afraid, given a mission assignment for the beauty of this world and for the expression of the Gospel and we have rejections. How can this be?

Then this beautiful phrase "*for nothing will be impossible with God.*" May I say it this way, for nothing will be impossible with love. Love is our primary motivator. Her response, as Lutherans we do not elevate her into the Mother of God position. We take her as a fellow servant, a fellow member of faith. We take her with great love and respect, but here's the response she had "Here am I, let it be according to your word." That is the invitation for you and I to respond with such love to the loving God. Here we are let it be according to your word to share love with this world.

We're going to burst into 2021. We're bursting into it with love, the culmination of this year. In all the expressions, I give thanks to God for people who have shared their love - dear nurses and allied health professionals, dear physicians, dear caregivers, everyone united in expressing their love to others. May it be God's blessing that they feel the love that we have for them. Encourage and support one another, in your own life. In this pandemic concern, know that God's love is for you, for me, for this world and the security that comes from something that can never be taken away. This is a gift that is forever, the love of God in Jesus Christ.

I give thanks for God's love story. We are so blessed to be loved. Amen