

God's Love, Our Life

Thomas Robinson, *Advent 4*, December 21, 2014

1 John 4:7-19

⁷ **Beloved**, let us **love** one another, for **love is from God**, and whoever loves has been **born of God and knows God**. ⁸ Anyone who does not love never knew God, because **God is love**.

⁹ In this the **love of God** was made **manifest among us**, that **God sent his unique Son** into the world, so that **we might live through him**. ¹⁰ In this is **love**, not that we have loved God but that **he loved us** and **sent his Son** to be the atoning sacrifice for our sins.

¹¹ **Beloved**, if **God so loved us**, we also **ought to love one another**. ¹² No one has ever seen **God**; if **we love** one another, **God abides in us** and his love is brought to completion among us. ¹³ In this we know that **we abide in him and he in us**, because **he has given us of his Spirit**.

¹⁴ And **we have seen and testify** that the **Father has sent his Son** to be the **Savior** of the world. ¹⁵ Whoever confesses that **Jesus is the Son of God**, **God abides in him, and he in God**, ¹⁶ and we have come **to know and to believe the love that God has for us**.

God is love, and whoever **abides in love abides in God, and God abides in him**.

¹⁷ In this that **love is brought to completion with us**, so that we may have **confidence** for the day of judgment, because **as he is so also are we in this world**.

¹⁸ There is **no fear in love**, but love in completion casts out fear. For fear has to do with punishment, and whoever fears has not come to completion in love.

¹⁹ **We love because he first loved us**.

John 3:14-17

¹⁴ "And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so must the **Son of Man be lifted up**, ¹⁵ that whoever **believes** in him may have **eternal life**.

¹⁶ For **God so loved the world, that he gave his unique Son**, that whoever **believes** in him should not perish but **have eternal life**. ¹⁷ For **God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him**."

John 15:9-12

⁹ "As the **Father has loved me**, so have **I loved you. Abide in my love**. ¹⁰ If you keep my commandments, you will abide in my love, just as I have kept my Father's commandments and abide in his love. ¹¹ These things I have spoken to you, that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be full. ¹² **This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you**."

Mark 12:29-31

²⁹ Jesus answered, "The most important [commandment] is, '*Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one*'. ³⁰ *And you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength*.' [Deut 6:4-5] ³¹ The second is this: '*You shall love your neighbor as yourself*.' There is no other commandment greater than these." [Lev 19:18]

Matthew 5:43-45

⁴³ "You have heard that it was said, 'You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.' ⁴⁴ But I say to you, Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, ⁴⁵ so that you may be children of your Father who is in heaven."

Ephesians 5:1

¹ Therefore be imitators of God, as beloved children. ² And walk in love, as the Messiah loved us and gave himself up for us

Love – Seeing the Whole Story of Jesus

After reflecting on the great themes of Advent, Hope, Peace, Joy, we conclude the series with love. Surprisingly, the narratives of Jesus birth don't talk much of love. There's much more of expectation, anticipation, joy. No one could know what the infant Messiah would be like. Many expected a military hero and king. Jesus himself had to draw together the strands of scripture and God's new action to reveal a messiah of fulfillment and surprise.

Thus Jesus gives one of the greatest Advent statements to Nicodemus in Jn 3. It is God's Love that causes him to give/send his unique Son (God's very own self) for the people of this world, so that we can believe/trust God as he shows himself in Jesus, lifted up on the cross to take on all that would destroy us and to give us his own eternal life.

Throughout his ministry Jesus called people to see the heart of God in love (rather than in rigorist purity and obedience or in ethnic identity). He even says, '*Love your enemies.*' In his last conversation with his disciples he challenges them to love as he has loved.

Jesus' own teaching provided the disciples with the frame for making sense of the horrible and astonishing events of crucifixion and resurrection. The whole NT takes up the task of interpreting life that flows from "the one who loved me and gave himself for me." [Gal 2:20]

Loving Each Other – Knowing God

1Jn 4:7-19 reads as an interpretation and meditation on Jesus' words to Nicodemus. What is the life that flows from trusting God's love? What does it mean personally, theologically? John spirals around God's love and our love, probing the deep connection and meaning.

He starts from the close community. Loving people who are faulty and present, not abstract. Why should I? Not for good order. Rather because of our longing for something more than self-interest, greed and power. We seek the transcendent in life. We seek God. That transcendent one has shown himself to us in Jesus and thus defined God's nature as self-giving love (*agapé*), engulfing and reshaping all that we thought we knew about God.

This self-giving love gives! It flows into God's creation into everyone truly touch by God. Thus *agapé* is the deepest, most basic sign that even a tiny, mortal creature like us has been adopted, re-born a child of God and that the new life/relationship/knowledge continues.

God is transcendent, hidden. But as we trust Jesus and love one another we become a center of his revelation to the world. The aim of his love to give life is brought to completion. We abide (live) in God and God in us (!) through God's Holy Spirit living in us.

This is what it really means to confess Jesus as Son of God. God is there in all he did and suffered and thus the hidden God becomes known in the love seen in Jesus. Out of this flows a confidence, intimacy, and ease with God and all the world. Fear is broken.

Celebrating the Beginning

When we celebrate Advent we are looking back through all that astonishing meaning to the first moments when this loving, beautiful face of God, God's self-giving love broke in.

It is possible to know about it without knowing it, abiding in it. But if you trust him, know him, you will be changed. You learn to love. You learn confidence. You share real life.