Springfield Presbyterian Church

Fourth Week of Advent 2020

The 292nd Day of March

**Those Who Dream Are Not Alone**

**The Candle of Love**

1. Love.

Love, is a powerful thing, often escaping the intensity of this feeling within our own

descriptors. Love is often something you cannot explain, you cannot force someone to love you, nor can you force yourself to love someone else. Love is connection, a bond that exclaims that something bigger than ourselves holds us together. Love is tied up in other feelings, feelings of comfort, of peace, of hope, and of joy.

We needed to get through our previous weeks of Advent, we needed to see hope in new ways, to prepare ourselves for a sense of peace that would overwhelm the world, and to feel joy even when it can be hard to feel. We needed those Sundays, we needed that space to bring us here, to the all-consuming, powerful feeling that we call love.

Love has been written or envisioned about in any form you can imagine – from song, to poetry, to art – from the very time of Earth’s creation to the words we share together today. War has come, difficult times have been present throughout the decades and centuries, but love continues to remain – it always has and it always will. Love conquers all.

In my own faith, the most powerful part of what I believe is that Jesus came into this world to be love personified. He came to teach us what love means, what love can look like, what love can do. In my belief in Christ, who again is love personified, as a disciple, I am called to personify love as best as I can in my human life. Everything else in my faith story, everything else I believe all hinges on this one point.

I was working in Philadelphia as an intern at an urban Presbyterian Church under the supervision of very experienced pastor. She said to me, in no certain terms, “Your sermons will look different week after week, but the core of your sermon will always stay the same – that foundation cannot leave you.” For her, it was discipleship that ran through all of her sermons, and in my five years here, from day one, the core of my sermons are about love. At the end of the day, as you close your eyes or rest from the weary world, if you understand that you are deeply loved by God and by this community – I’ve followed the call in my heart.

1. Mary’s Song

So when we hear Mary’s Song this morning, my heart rejoices in her joy, and in her

excitement in bearing the Son of the Most High, love personified. She’s read the stories, she’s heard from her grandparents, she’s steeped in her Jewish faith – she knows what the prophets have said and what this means. She knows that what lies inside of her is the beginning of something new, the answer to a generation full of woes and distress, and the coming day of salvation. Within her teenage body, she feels the small kicks of a baby boy against her stomach, and in her heart, she’s able to get past all of the anxieties that could crush her. In this moment, in her song, she is not saying, ‘Why me?’ she is saying, ‘Thank you God, for letting me be part of this story.’

Again, she understands the story of love to be much bigger than her own life on Earth. She’s able to foresee in some sense what is to come – she’s able to envision this life where the wicked are removed from power, where the hungry are fed, where the lowly and disheartened are given hope once again. She considers herself blessed and she rejoices – she rejoices for a love that changes things.

1. But We Aren’t There Yet

One of the challenges though, that we face as we read her song today, is that

what she proclaims has not yet been fulfilled in fruition. That’s hard for us – the reality she sings about is somewhat true – there is some evidence of a more whole society, but this picture of the kingdom she has is much more than what we live today. We are at a – we’re not there yet – kind of moment in history. We see glimpses, we see moments where neighbor reaches out to neighbor, or where we find unexpected places of sacred peace, or joy that cannot be expressed in words. We see it, we see that it is possible, that is what we proclaim as Christ’s own, but we can also claim that we aren’t there yet.

1. You are not Alone

And so we dream, we dream of the days where love surrounds us and love holds

us in new and amazing ways. We know though, that this is not our dream alone, we know that the crafting of the kingdom, the song that Mary sings, isn’t done by you, or by me, alone in a room, tucked away from the world. We are not alone. You are not alone. I am not alone.

Love reminds us that we aren’t alone. Have you ever been the first one to say those tender three words, “I love you” and hope you’ll hear them back? Have you dared to say it before the other person is ready to say it back? Love is daring and scary and vulnerable and it requires our whole hearts to open up and to take chances. But when we do, when we are just that scandalous, when we say I love you – we remind each other that we aren’t alone, that God is with us, that we are connected, and that each day we are moving towards a future where Mary’s song is a little bit more alive than it was yesterday.

So the words I have to say to you are simple and also not simple at all – I love you. I love each one of you. I love you when you drive me nuts, I hope you love me when I drive you nuts, I love you when we are together and when we are apart. You do not need to do anything for me to love you – you don’t need fancy words, expensive gifts, or Christmas cookies (although, I do hear that helps…). No. Because Christ first loved me, because our God brought love into this world through Jesus, I know the power of love and I long to share that in authenticity.

Again, maybe the challenge this week is simple or really hard – but it’s to let those three vulnerable words fall from your mouth, “I love you.” It connects us, it reminds us that we are not alone, and it points us back to the hopes of Mary and of the prophets – of a love that is above all.

So, this Sunday, from me to you – may you know – deeply and authentically that God loves you and so do I. May that kind of love encourage us, root us, and guide us these days as we wait for our Savior to come. Amen.