

Advent 2020 Week Four:
Finding LOVE in Our Differences
Sunday, December 20, 2020

This year our Advent theme is...
(adapted from Outreach.com 2020 Advent Theme)

Rediscovering Thankfulness This Christmas Season

Week 1: Finding Hope is Our Uncertainties

Week 2: Finding Peace in Our Struggles

WEEK 3: FINDING JOY IN OUR DISCOURAGEMENTS

Week 4: Finding Love in Our Differences

Week 5: Finding Christ in Our World

MY HEART IS FILLED WITH THANKFULNESS

Week 4: LOVE

My heart is filled with thankfulness To Christ Who Brings me **LOVE**
Whose presence brings me **Hope** and **Peace**, and fills my life with **Joy**
For ev'ry day I have on earth Is showered in His **Love**
So I will give my life, my all To love and follow Him

© 2003 Thankyou Music (Admin. by Capitol CMG Publishing). CCLI Song No. 4108704. Words and music by Keith Getty/Stuart Townend. Adapted by W. Moak. 2020.

As is our tradition we will ask a member to come and light the Advent Candles and read a scripture and lead us in a prayer.

The 4th Advent candle represents LOVE. LOVE is an important theme relating to Christmas, and especially relating to the Advent season leading up to Christmas. Our world is in desperate need of genuine LOVE.. Christ came at Christmas to bring us this LOVE, and that is what we want to see in the Scriptures this morning.

Week Four Advent Reading and Candle Lighting : LOVE

Love is a gift; a gift from God. At Christmastime, we as Christians believe that God's greatest gift of love was Jesus, the Savior of the world. As we read the Christmas narrative in the gospels, an angel appears to Joseph telling him that he will have a son and instructing Joseph to name his son Emmanuel, meaning 'God with us'. Jesus was born a baby, fully God and fully human, and taught us how to love by living with us on earth and being an example to us. Jesus taught us to love everyone, no matter what. He taught us to love our enemies. He taught us not to discriminate, not to label people, not to play favorites. He taught us to welcome strangers into our homes, to feed people who are hungry, to give clothes to those who need clothing, to visit people in prison, to give a drink of cold water to those who are thirsty, and to love those who are different from us.

Prayer:

O Heavenly Father, God of all love, Thank you for loving us. Thank you for the Advent and Christmas season, which reminds us to love others. May we Rediscover Thankfulness this Christmas Season by Choosing Love, Even in our Differences.

<https://www.torontohhs.org/2017/12/24/advent-week-4-love/#:~:text=This%20fourth%20candle%20represents%20love,the%20Savior%20of%20the%20world.>

WEEK 4: FINDING LOVE IN OUR DIFFERENCES

“It’s Christmas time and Lucy comes to Charlie Brown and says, “Merry Christmas, Charlie Brown! At this time of year I think we should put aside all our differences and try to be kind.” Charlie Brown counters with some questions: “Why does it have to be for just this time of year? Why can’t it be all year ‘round?’”

Lucy retorts with her negative, disparaging tone: “What are you, some kind of fanatic or something?”

“Today, I want to declare that when it comes to love, disciples of Jesus are supposed to be some kind of fanatics or something.

We are not just supposed to put our differences aside and be kind during the Christmas season, we are supposed to do it all year ‘round.

Disciples of Jesus are called to live lives that are characterized by love. Jesus said it clearly and concisely:

“I give you a new command: Love one another. Just as I have loved you, you are also to love one another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another” (John 13:34-35).

Our love for our brothers and sisters in Christ, our love for God, and our love for everyone in the world, even our enemies will be the biggest sign that we are people of God”. <https://www.sermoncentral.com/sermons/disciples-of-jesus-are-characterized-by-love-david-owens-sermon-on-love-251637?page=2&wc=800>

“You’ve all probably read or watched “How the Grinch Stole Christmas”. It starts out, “Every who down in Who-ville liked Christmas a lot, but the Grinch who lived just north of Who-ville did not.” The Grinch hates the celebrations, hates the singing, hates the presents, and hates the whole thing. So he devises a plan to slip down into the town in the night, bag up all the trappings of Christmas, take all the presents, and ruin Christmas.

And he does. And the next morning he stands on his mountain waiting for the people to wake up, and be devastated.

But instead, he hears singing. The Whos wake up and it doesn’t matter to them that they didn’t have trees or presents or decorations. And it turns out that no matter what he tried to take away from them, Christmas came anyway. And it stuns him. And he says to himself, “Maybe Christmas, doesn’t come from a store. Maybe Christmas, perhaps, means a little bit more.”

The story tells us that the Grinch’s heart grew three sizes that day. And he returns all the things he took, and is welcomed to the feast and, yes, even carves the roast beast.

When he saw the love that the Whos had, when he realized that this love was inside of them and couldn’t be taken away, that’s when he realized what it was all about, and that’s when he was changed too. You are I, we are not Whos from Whoville. But we are Christians. And we are the people who spend this time of year preparing our hearts for the one who is yet to come, and being transformed in the process. And we have something we can share with the world.

This time of year, no matter what is happening around us, we are called to prepare our hearts to love anyway. We’re asked to open them up and to get ready to welcome Christ into the world. But more than that, we are called to love that world”. <https://emilycheath.com/2015/12/20/when-love-changes-everything-even-you-sermon-for-the-fourth-sunday-of-advent-2015/>

Our Advent Theme is Finding Love in Our Differences, but the sermon subtitle is

Building Bridges of Love at Christmas & Ever Other Day of the Year

John 1:14...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 3:16...For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish but have everlasting life.

1 John 4:7-11...⁷ Dear friends, let us love one another, because love is from God, and everyone who loves has been born of God and knows God. ⁸ The one who does not love does not know God, because God is love. ⁹ God’s love was revealed among us in this way: God sent His One and Only Son into the world so that we might live through Him. ¹⁰ Love consists in this: not that we loved God, but that He loved us and sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins. ¹¹ Dear friends, if God loved us in this way, we also must love one another.

It doesn’t take very much insight to see that we are living in a world that it is not at peace, there seems to be more barriers than bridges these days.

I want to challenge each of us to become Bridge Builders!

“Two brothers living on adjoining farms fell into conflict after 40 years of working together. It began with a small misunderstanding, grew to a major difference, and finally exploded in an exchange of bitter words, followed by weeks of silence. One morning, there was a knock on the older son’s door. He opened it to find a man with a carpenter’s toolbox. “I’m looking for a few days’ work,” he said. “Perhaps you would have a few small jobs here and there that I could help with? Yes,” he said, “I do have a job for you. Look across the creek at that farm; that’s my younger brother! Last week, there was a meadow between us, but he took his bulldozer and dug a creek between us. I’m going to do him one better. See that pile of old lumber? I want you to build an 8 foot high fence between us so I can’t see his farm or his face anymore.” The carpenter said, “Show me the nails and the tools, and I’ll do a good job for you.” The older brother went to town for the day. When he returned at sunset, his eyes opened wide, and his jaw dropped. There was no fence at all. Instead, the carpenter had built a bridge stretching from one side of the creek to the other, handrails and all! His younger brother came toward them with an outstretched hand. “You’re quite the guy,” he said, “after all I’ve said and done.” The two brothers met in the middle, and shook each other’s hand. When they saw the carpenter leaving they said, “Wait! Stay a few days. We have other projects for you.” “I’d love to,” the carpenter said, “but I have many more bridges to build.”

<https://www.sermoncentral.com/sermons/building-bridges-thomas-clawser-sermon-on-church-224695>

- **Reaffirm Your Understanding that You are Loved by God**
- **Reaffirm Your Understanding That God Loves All People**
- **Reaffirm God’s Command to Love Others as Christ Loved Us**
(Unconditionally, Sacrificially, Mercifully)
- **Make Love A Priority In Your Words and Your Actions**
(Be Willing To Love Even If It Is Not The Popular Nor Convenient Thing To Do. Go Outside Your Comfort Zone. Beyond Your Social Circle).

In his book, “Through the Valley of the Kwai,” Earnest Gordon tells the following story: / We found ourselves on the same track with several carloads of Japanese wounded after we were freed from the Kwai prison camp. These unfortunates were on their

own without medical care. No longer fit for action in Burma, they had been packed into railway cars which were being returned to Bangkok. They were in a shocking state. I have never seen men filthier. Uniforms were encrusted with mud, blood, and excrement. Their wounds, sorely inflamed and full of pus, crawled with maggots. The maggots, however, in eating the putrefying flesh, probably prevented gangrene. It was apparent why the Japanese were so cruel to their prisoners. If they didn’t care for their own, why should they care for us? The wounded looked at us forlornly as they sat with their heads resting against the carriages, waiting for death. They had been discarded as expendable, the refuse of war. These were the enemy. They were more cowed and defeated than we had ever been. Without a word most of the officers in my section unbuckled their packs, took out part of their ration and a rag or two, and, with water canteens in their hands, went over to the Japanese train. Our guards tried to prevent us, bawling, “No goodka! No goodka!” But we ignored them and knelt down by the enemy to give water and food, to clean and bind up their wounds. Grateful cries of “Aragatto!” (“Thank you”) followed us when we left—. I regarded my comrades with wonder. Eighteen months ago they would have joined readily in the destruction of our captors had they fallen into their hands. Now these same officers were dressing the enemy’s wounds. We had experienced a moment of grace, there in those bloodstained railway cars. God had broken through the barriers of our prejudice and had given us the will to obey His command, “Thou shalt love.” (Earnest Gordon, “Through the Valley of the Kwai” as cited by James S. Hewett in “Illustrations Unlimited, pp. 119-120 – Bruce Howell, SermonCentral)

The following story is adapted from “Breaking Barriers And Building Bridges
Contributed by Steven Dow on Feb 11, 2005 Scripture: John 4:1-42

<https://www.sermoncentral.com/sermons/breaking-barriers-and-building-bridges-steven-dow-sermon-on-racism-76334>

“In 1962, George Wallace ran for governor of Alabama on a platform that was blatantly racist. He promised to fight integration to the point of defying federal orders and personally blockading schoolhouse doors. He ended his inaugural address with the infamous statement, “I say segregation, now, segregation tomorrow, segregation forever.” That

summer, he refused to allow black students to register at the University of Alabama until forced to do so by the threat of military intervention. Through his tenure as governor and a run for the presidency in 1968, Wallace spouted racial hatred while blacks were beaten and jailed, black churches were burned, and black children were murdered. Source: Tim Woodroof, Walk This Way: An Interactive Guide to Following Jesus, [Colorado Springs: NavPress, 1999], pgs. 62-63 (Joel Smith, SermonCentral)

George Wallace models for us how to build barriers and burn bridges to those who we perceive as different from us. I trust that few if any of us have held such hatred towards those who are not like you, but odds are that you have harbored biases towards others. But we don't like to face the sometimes ugly truth about ourselves.

Like Paul Harvey, let me give you the rest of the story. On May 15, 1972 while campaigning in Laurel, Maryland, Wallace was shot five times, leaving him paralyzed and in constant pain. Two years later – confined to a wheel chair, divorced from his second wife, without the use of his legs, and lacking control of bodily functions – Wallace was a broken, pathetic figure. He was a man who finally understood the meaning of suffering. He was a man who had come to realize what suffering he had caused others. While being driven home one evening, he passed the open doors of Dexter Avenue Baptist Church, a black congregation where years earlier Martin Luther King, Jr., had stood in the pulpit and denounced Wallace for his treatment of African Americans. Overcome with remorse, Wallace stopped the car, was helped into his wheelchair, and wheeled up the aisle to the stunned surprise of the assembly. There, Wallace tearfully confessed he had been wrong, apologized for the suffering he had caused, and asked the blacks of Alabama to forgive him. It was an expression of remorse he was to repeat on numerous occasions in the following years – publicly, before black audiences on campuses and conventions, and privately, to black leaders like Coretta Scott King and Jesse Jackson. During two more terms as governor (1974 and 1982), he built bridges to the black community, developed relationships with prominent black leaders, and worked to undo some of the damage his own racist rhetoric had caused. Until the very end, while bedridden and deaf, he still received visits from friends, both black and white, and met with groups of both races for prayer. Not all blacks forgave Wallace. The damage he did and the pain he caused was great. Here is a man who was tragically flawed and terribly wrong. It took five bullets and horrific suffering to bring him to his knees. But once broken, he had the courage to face his hatred and

prejudice, repent, confess, and then spend the remainder of his life attempting to atone and make restitution. SOURCE: Tim Woodroof, Walk This Way: An Interactive Guide to Following Jesus, (Colorado Springs: NavPress, 1999), 62-63. (Joel Smith, SermonCentral)

If a man like George Wallace could do it, so can you and I. Let me close by reminding you what hangs in the balance with another story of a popular figure.

In his autobiography, Mahatma Gandhi wrote that during his student days he read the Gospels seriously and considered converting to Christianity. He believed that in the teachings of Jesus he could find the solution to the caste system that was dividing the people of India. So one Sunday he decided to attend services at a nearby church and talk to the minister about becoming a Christian. When he entered the sanctuary, however, the usher refused to give him a seat and suggested that he worship with his own people. Gandhi left the church and never returned, “If Christians have caste differences also” he said, “I might as well remain a Hindu.” That usher’s prejudice not only betrayed Jesus but also turned a person away from trusting Him as Savior. (David Yarbrough, SermonCentral)

Gandhi was perhaps the most influential leader of his people in his day. And here was the opportunity to influence this influential leader for Jesus Christ. He was open to receiving Jesus. He was openly seeking Jesus. And because of the prejudiced actions of a church usher the opportunity was missed and he turned his back on Jesus and His church. Think of what could have been if Gandhi would have become a Christian and then used his considerable influence to reach his people for Jesus. I don't know about you, but I wouldn't want to be in that ushers' shoes when he has to stand before Jesus and give an account of his actions. During his earthly ministry Jesus shattered the stereotypes of “us” and “them.” During his day he had to go it alone. But what about today? Does he still have to go it alone? Or will you go with him? <https://www.sermoncentral.com/sermons/breaking-barriers-and-building-bridges-steven-dow-sermon-on-racism-76334>

**It's Time For Us To Find Love Even In Our Differences.
It's Time For Us To Start Building Bridges, Not Barriers.
It Starts With Giving Our Heart To God And Then Letting His
Love Flow Through Us To A World That So Desperately Needs It.**