*DAILY DEVOTIONS*

December 7 - 12

Third Week of Advent: Love

**Monday, December 7 1 Corinthians 13:4-13**

*“Love is . . .”*

 The Greek language has several different words for love, while in English we have just one. *Eros* was the word the Greeks used for love when it defined intense physical desire. But neither the verb nor noun form of *eros* is found in the New Testament. A Greek word for a more reciprocal kind of love appears in the Bible a number of times; that word is *philos* which describes brotherly love. The word that Paul used was *agape*, a word found quite sparingly in secular Greek writings, but used widely by Paul and the other authors of the New Testament books.

 *Agape* was used to describe God’s action in sending Jesus Christ into the world. It was a love that reached out to those who did not deserve it; a love that put the interest of others first; a love that forgave people and started over with them; and a love that sacrificed itself for others. If we were to go through this passage and everywhere the word “love” appears substitute the word “Christ,” they would still be true because the kind of love being described is love that has its source in God.

*May I love others, Lord, as you have loved me through Christ. Amen.*

**Tuesday, December 8 Luke 10:25-37**

*“Love means being a neighbor”*

 How can one be a neighbor? It takes eyes and ears to be a neighbor, as well as a compassionate heart. The one major difference between the priest and Levite on the one hand the Samaritan on the other is not what they see and hear, but what they do with what they see and hear. Only the Samaritan takes pity. Only he has a neighborly heart. Neighbors are people with a heart that does more than pump blood. It sees, feels, and serves.

 One often hears that the task of dealing with pain in the world is so vast that we do not know where to begin or how we can even hope to make a dent in what needs to be done. Such thinking can become an excuse for inaction. A better attitude is to pitch in where one senses an ability to help. Maybe I cannot help everywhere, but I can help somewhere and try to do a meaningful work of service. Being a neighbor does not require meeting every need of which I become aware, but of becoming one piece of a large puzzle that brings the love of God to people in need.

*With open eyes, ears, and heart, Lord, I will be a neighbor to the needy. Amen.*

**Wednesday, December 9 John 15:9-17**

*“Love one another as I have loved you”*

 Jesus’ command to his disciples is very specific. They are to love one another as he has loved them. This does not mean merely tolerating or being nice to one another, but is a call to sacrifice on behalf of one another, even the sacrifice of death, if necessary. As these men have heard Jesus say that the Good Shepherd “lays down” his life for the sheep and watched him lay down his garments to wash their feet, so they are to lay down their lives for one another in humble imitation of Jesus.

 Jesus has opened the way for this new kind of relationship among these men, calling them “friends,” not “servants.” His love has broken down the wall which separates the master from the slave, the rich from the poor, the one who comes first from the one who comes last. Because these disciples are his friends, Jesus has shown them his heart, revealing the purpose of his coming, holding nothing back. Now they know that love means lifting up those who are weak, easing the burdens of the overloaded, and placing the needs of others ahead of one’s own.

*You are my friend, Lord, and I will follow your command to love. Amen.*

*DAILY DEVOTIONS*

December 7 - 12

Third Week of Advent: Love

**Thursday, December 10 Luke 6:32-36**

*“Love your enemies”*

 In these verses Jesus addresses the ethical character that he expects from his disciples. Fundamental to his ethic is love – not a love like the world’s, but an exceptional love that endures. Jesus drives home the point with a series of questions (vv. 32-34). The fundamental point is that if we love only those who are kind to us, that takes no special effort. Even sinners love that way. The call of the disciple is to a greater love, a distinct love, a love that is unique in the world. This love even involves using our resources to meet the needs of others.

 This love also involves loving our enemies, doing good, lending while expecting nothing back, and recognizing that the reward for such love is from God who lives in heaven. Jesus’ disciples should love with a love so different that the world can see it. Such love is rewarded because it marks out the presence of the children of God, who reflect the character of God. God himself is kind to the ungrateful and selfish. To be his child is to reveal the Father’s love. In other words, the standard of the disciple’s behavior is the merciful character of God.

*Lord, help me to love those who are difficult to love. Amen.*

**Friday, December 11 Romans 8:31-39**

*“Nothing can ever separate us from his love”*

 Paul may have had the Abraham and Isaac story in mind when he spoke in verse 32 of the Father “who did not spare his own son.” These words closely follow the account of Genesis 22 where the Lord put Abraham to the test by requiring him to sacrifice Isaac. Paul appears to be saying that in the same way that Abraham’s commitment to the Lord was exhibited by his readiness to give even his son, so the Father’s commitment to the human race was clearly expressed in his readiness to give his only Son. This being the case, it is reasonable for believers to trust that God, having given the greatest, will not fail “to give us all things.”

 Paul goes on to proclaim that there is nothing that can possible affect the eternal purposes of God or the undying love of Christ. Even death cannot rob the believer, because to be “absent from the body” is to be “present with the Lord.” Life to Paul was “Christ” but to die was “gain.” Life with all its pains and problems held no terrors for him for he lived secure in the love of Christ which would see him safely into eternal life with God.

*My assurance of eternal life, Lord, rests in your love for me. Amen.*

**Saturday, December 12 John 3:16-17**

*“For God so love the world”*

 Love is central to the very nature of God, reaching out to all who are unlovely and sick, like us sinners. That love is not selective or discriminating. It is universal, with no limitations. God comes to the whole world in love. These verses also reveal that God’s love is never passive. It is the very nature of love to give the best and not hold back. And the gift is unique, “the only begotten.” The greater the object of love, the more costly the gift. “Any old thing” is not good enough. That would not be love. The invitation is to believe, and we can only accept the invitation on God’s terms – we must believe to receive eternal life.

 Here is the great paradox, the two-edged meaning of Jesus’ coming. He came in love to save, to heal, and to offer spiritual birth. He did not come to condemn or judge. But his coming sharpens the issue. Now we must decide! There is both wondrous possibility and great peril in coming to Jesus. If we choose to accept, we will be born again. But if we choose to turn aside, to leave, to work out our own salvation by our own efforts, we will perish.

*I choose to accept your love, Lord, and place my trust in your Son. Amen.*