**Advent: The Church Welcomes Christ**

Loving God, Loving Others

Or, How do we identify and practice God’s love?

John 3:16; 15:12-14

“For God so loved the world that He gave His one and only Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish, but have eternal life. . . My command is this: Love each other as I have loved you. Greater love has no one than this, that he lay down his life for his friends. You are my friends if you do what I command.”

To paraphrase: God loved the world like this: He sacrificed His one-of-a kind Son to give His very life to everyone who trusts Him. . . Now, here is the summary of what you should do: Love as I love you, for it’s impossible to love more than giving your life. If you are truly mine, this sacrificial lifestyle will characterize you and you will live for others rather than self.

Along with being one of the most commonly used words, “love” also is one of the least understood, most often overused and abused words. We love hoagies, baseball, children, and board games, so when we say we love God and one another, surely it requires some explanation and nuance. Advent helps with this because it focuses our attention on the greatest gift ever by the greatest Giver possible to the neediest people imaginable. We do well to take some time to sort out our loves.

**Six Counterfeit Loves** (Different, but often overlapping, warped “loves”):

*Control*, or selfish love. “I’m doing this for your own good.” Real love frees. 1 Cor. 13:4, 5

*Lust*, or sensual love. “You would if you loved me.” Real love sacrifices. 1 Cor. 13:6, 7

*Jealousy*, or smothering love. “I want you all to myself.” Real love is not angry. Prov. 27:4

*Enabling*, or fearful love. “I love him so much it hurts.” Real love is courageous. 1 Jn. 4:18

*Words*, or empty love. “You’ll be in my thoughts.” Real love acts. 1 John 3:17-19

*Barter, or “useful love.”* “I’ll love you if. . .” Real love is unconditional. 1 Peter 4:8

**Six Qualities of God’s Love** (what it looks like, what it accomplishes):

*It is Unilateral:* He initiates without guarantee of return. Matt. 13:1-23; 22:1-14

Everyone who is offered salvation does not accept it.

*It is Sacrificial*: He gives without hope of repayment. Micah 6:6-8; Titus 3:3-7

No one who receives salvation could ever “pay it back.”

*It is Persistent:* He repeatedly reaches out in spite of rejection. Luke 13:34

Few, if any of us, say “Yes!” the first time.

*It is Truth-Based:* He has no delusions about us. Psalm 10:11-14

He loves us in spite of our flaws, foibles, failures, and rebellion.

*It is Free:* He loves us purely, taking no advantage. Psalm 50:7-15

There is no danger He is using us to make up for His own inadequacies.

*It is Purposeful:* He loves us as trophies of His free grace. Ephesians 2:1-6

His love results in our being conformed to the image of His Son.

**Six Ways we can Love like God loves** (albeit imperfectly):

*Generosity:* We can spend our time and resources on others. 1 John 3:16-19

*Mercy:* We can extend grace to our “enemies.” Matt. 5:43-48

*Integrity:* We can speak and live with honesty. Colossians 3:9-14

*Forgiveness:* We can choose to forgive others. Matthew 6:5-13

*Freedom:* We can choose to love freely, without strings. Luke 14:12-14

*Truth:* We can proclaim God’s love through the Gospel to the nations. John 20:21

***So, what is your LQ (love quotient)?***

*1. Have you received God’s love-gift to you, forgiveness through Jesus?*

*2.* *Are your relationships characterized by healthy, Christ-like love?*