Lownes Free Church Sunday Morning – December 23, 2018

Advent:

The Church Welcomes Christ

LOVE: God’s Light and Life

His Greatest Gift, Our Highest Priority

 “God is love.” But because He also is “righteous,” “light,” and “a consuming fire,” His love is not swayed by emotion. Luther puts it like this: “The love of God does not find, but creates, that which is pleasing to it. The love of man comes into being through that which is pleasing to it.”

 “Human love seeks those things which are its own and receives rather than gives something good. The. . . love of God which lives in man loves sinners, evil persons, fools, and weaklings in order to make them righteous, good, wise, and strong. Rather than seeking its own good, the love of God flows forth and bestows good. Therefore sinners are attractive because they are loved; they are not loved because they are attractive.” (The Heidelberg Disputation, Thesis 28, April 26, 1518)

 While human love avoids sinners and evil people, God’s love reaches out to them, that is, us. We love by what we see; He is not a respecter of persons. This is why we can trust God’s love. This is the love that transforms us and reaches out to others. This is the love of Jesus coming into our world.

**God’s love radiates from within the Godhead.** 1 John 4:8, 16

 In ways we can not begin to grasp, Father, Son, and Spirit have loved one another eternally. John 3:35; 5:20; 17:5; see also Genesis 1:26; 3:22; 11:7; Isaiah 6:8. So love is “natural” to God, that is, it is His state of being. This is not like rocks being hard and water being wet, but more like the sun shining or a fountain flowing, since the shining and flowing are of their essences. We would say, “they can’t help” but shine or flow. So God does not have to work up love or ever begin to love, nor can His love ever end, since it is not merely something He does, but also who He is. God’s love is His eternal giving of Himself.

**God’s love transforms us.**  1 John 5:1-5

While there are many qualities God does not and can not communicate to us (omniscience, omnipotence, omnipresence), He does communicate His love, the SAME love Father, Son, and Spirit have for one another (John 17:20-26). Just as the sun illuminates and fountains flow, God’s love enlightens and energizes. 1 John 1:5; 2:29; 3:7

**God’s love is fully expressed in the Gospel.** John 3:16-21

In the Cross, God can be righteous: fully just (the debt of sin paid) AND loving (He really wants to forgive us). This righteous message (Rom. 3:21-26) is the light which

illuminates our darkness both by giving us eyes to see and revealing things as they are, not what they seem to be. John 1:1-9, 14; 8:12; 9:39-41

**Only the Cross makes sense of the Crèche.** Matthew 1:18-25

 Our fallen humanity makes it possible to be so caught up in the sentimentality of the birth of a child in a lonely stable that we miss the real message altogether. But all we really have to do is read the whole story to see what is happening. If Jesus comes to save us, we must need saving. If He comes to save us from our sins, we must be sinners. If He is “God with us,” then before He came, we were without God. And so forth. But how will He save?

 Even before Jesus’ birth, the prophets portrayed Messiah as a suffering man of sorrow. Isaiah 53 is a great example, for even before His birth the Cross was casting a shadow over the Crèche. Simeon the prophet, who was visiting the Temple the first time Joseph and Mary brought Jesus there, understood and predicted that this little baby would eventually cause great conflict (as well as grief to His mother). Luke 2:22-35

 This is how and why the Incarnation is the ultimate love story. God becomes one of us because He loves us, and then dies for us, that we may be forgiven and live without guilt or sin with Him forever. When Jesus was raised from the dead, God was placing His approval upon the work of Jesus, and an exclamation mark on the declaration of His love.

 This is why Jesus is the only way to God; only He is from God; only He IS God. And only this God is love. Have we not great and wonderful things for which to praise Him? Dare we suggest that somehow there are other paths to God?

***We are being transformed by God’s love as we. . .***

1. Receive gladly God’s gospel of love and forgiveness. Rom. 5:1-5; 1 Thess. 1:1-10; 2:13

2. Love God in return and follow Him in obedience. John 14:15, 21, 15:8-11

3. Love others by laying down our lives for them. 1 John 3:11-18; 1 Corinthians 13