

**There is only love** 3rd Sunday of Advent 12-12-21

When we lit the first Advent candle, our prayer that day called to mind the star of wisdom that we follow, the Divine wisdom that is always available to us as our guide. Today we follow that star to the gift of Christ-love, alive *in us* today, the Love that calls us to be light to the world.

Love. Such a small, 4 lettered word to hold the heft of so much meaning! I have a teenage nephew who resists saying, “I love you,” not because he doesn’t feel deep affection and appreciation for his family, but because he is highly skeptical of how easy it is in the English language to “throw this one word around” for so many different things!

I *love* the milk chocolate santas my daughter Sarah sent out to the family in honor of our much *loved* family tradition of setting out our boots on the eve of the feast of St. Nicholas. I *love* Sarah, and her thoughtfulness! I *love* that sweet little elf, my grandson Eli, Sarah’s son born of the *love* she and her husband Noah share, the *love* that created their family. (And the rest of you, if you’re listening, I *love* you too, even if I haven’t mentioned you by name today!”-)

I love my nephew, who is not wrong about the word LOVE! I love his mom, my sister Gen, who shared that snippet of a story recently as part of a beautiful essay she wrote. As I did my thinking, praying, pacing, thinking, praying, writing process this week, I thought about that nephew, and how my sister Gen lovingly affirmed his insight by going on to name the Greek words for different types of love: **eros** (passionate love); **philia** (affectionate love); **agape** (selfless, or god-like love) **storge** (familial love); **ludus** (playful love); **mania** (obsessive love); **pragma** (enduring love) and **philautia** (the love of self).

In the Celtic tradition there is the love of **Anam Cara...the soul friend**. This morning, right about now, my Anam Cara Reverend Sue, is with her congregation sharing her wisdom about holy friendship, about ours, and about the holy friendship between Mary, mother of Jesus, and her cousin Elizabeth, two other women who said

yes to God's call, an unexpected call birthed in them. A call clearly visible-- and often confounding-- to all around them who witnessed our unexpected pregnancies.

Sue and I talk frequently, and we both treasure our soul-friendship, the gift of having a friend who sees us completely, failings and fumbblings *and* beauty. In the past 7 years, we've been *mirrors* to each other of our best selves, mirrors of Christ-love.

Our mutual trust is nurtured in our willingness to share our *NOT best selves*, to be open to sharing our vulnerability, and trusting the openhearted listening we receive that lets our hearts rest in each other's company. And the deep soil of this friendship *calls forth in us* the gifts that we each long to share with the world through our ministries.

Today's scripture passage in the Unity Advent and Christmas book is from 1 John 4:16:

*So we have known **and believe** the love that God has for us. God **is** love, and those who abide in love abide in God, and God abides in them.*

**HOW** do we *know and believe* the love that God has for us? Before I share one of my early memories of knowing this love, I'm going to invite you to take a moment to think about how *you* have known that love... Do you feel God's love through a beloved family member, through the kind words of a dear friend, (or the adoring gaze of a furry, four-legged friend), is there a place that evokes the sacred for you? (PAUSE)

"In this moment, in this place, I remember who I am..."

On the first Sunday of Advent, I shared a little bit about my advent memories growing up, but there is one year that stands out for my whole family. Over the years I've often told the story about the Christmas I was 15. My dad had been laid off and our family, where money was lean in those days even in good times, was really struggling financially.

Like always just after Thanksgiving, we chose our "Kris Kringle," the person in the family we would be especially kind to during Advent. My parents let us six kids know

that it was going to be a sparse, really simple Christmas that year. What I remember (and maybe it's fuzzy, but still!) is that we all pitched in and *simple* turned out to be just right.

In my memory, it seems that it was easier that year to be nice to my brothers. We were in it together as a family, and doing small kind gestures and helping the “little kids,” Genny and Bryan make gifts, were all part of our preparations that year. On Christmas Eve, as we did every year, we put baby Jesus in the manger, sang Silent Night and read our birthday present to Jesus, the box of little strips of paper where we wrote down the loving things we'd done.

After the youngest ones went to bed, we “big kids” got to help mom and dad put our simple gifts under the tree. As we finished though, we heard a noise, and got to the door just in time to see the rear lights of a car driving away down our long driveway. There on the stoop were two enormous boxes. Stunned with gratitude and awe, we dragged them into the living room: one filled with wrapped and labeled gifts for each of us, and one filled to overflowing with food. The Brothers from St Joseph's priory and a few people from our parish had put a Christmas miracle of love on our doorstep.

It took me a long time to realize that in telling the story of that big, glorious, miracle of abundance we received, I long overlooked a smaller, yet no less glorious miracle of six kids being pretty kind to each other in those weeks of winter! Like every family, we were then, and still are, a complex ecosystem, and far from perfect. :-) Yet that Advent, small tender acts of love brought my family a little closer to each other, and every time we tell the story again we are invited to come a little closer to knowing God is love, and there is only love...

Philia. Agape. Sorge. Love. Anam Cara. Father-Mother God. Spirit. Beloved. Christ  
Consciousness ...

My nephew's skepticism is spot on. All of the words, in all of the languages, in all of the world...still fall short as we try to name and articulate what it is to KNOW Love, to know that *God is love*.

In a wedding ceremony, when it comes time for the couple to say their vows, I remind them that "words, which by their very nature are inadequate to express what is so deeply held in your hearts, are also the powerful tools you will now use to create your union." And then we pause for a breath of silence...to feel the heft, and beauty, the joy and solemnity of that moment.

We humans have the gift-- and challenge-- of an ability to think and share words. We have words of inspiration from sacred texts, from poetry, from songs...words that rile us and inspire us, words of kindness and comfort from our loved ones, words of forgiveness after words of anger, words of celebration, words that surround grief and loss. Words can point us toward love, and words can put up walls that shut love out.

And so, it is sometimes in the *silence* that we fully appreciate and experience the presence of God. In a tender moment, we feel the presence of Love behind the words of a loved one. In the silence when words have failed us, and we sit with a friend who is suffering, our presence is Christ-presence. When we let the steady stream of our inner chatter settle into some semblance of quiet through prayer or meditation, we hear the Loving voice of God within. In the wordless voice of waves and wind and birdsong, we hear the voice of God. Even in the voiceless silence of our own grief and sorrow, we can hear the voice of God whisper with infinite love.

And that voice of God is *loving* us into BEING Love, into BEING presence, into BEING the healing light of Christ-love at work in the world. Advent invites us to listen to the voice of Divine Wisdom as we follow that star. To remember the gifts of hope, faith, peace, love and joy, not just for our own sakes alone, but to *be* love in action and bring that Light to the world.

This week in our Spirit Group, Mary shared a beautiful prayer of St. Theresa:

Peace

May today there be peace within you.

May you trust God that you are  
exactly where you are meant to be.

May you not forget the infinite possibilities  
that are born of faith.

May you use those gifts that you have received,  
and pass on the love that has been given to you.

May you be content knowing  
you are a beloved child of God.

Let this presence settle into your bones,  
and allow your soul the freedom to sing,  
to dance, to praise, and to love.

It is there for each and every one of us.

~ St. Theresa's Prayer

Beloved child of God...Let the presence settle into your bones.

We become exactly what Love calls us to be when we are fully present to each other, and fully aware of the Christ born *in* us.

That presence is the gift we share when we come to the quiet, *and* when we gather together in community-- the gift of *knowing and believing* God's presence and love abide in the magic and mystery, in the joy and sorrow, in the words and silence...

I invite you to close your eyes for just a moment, and call to mind again those ways *you* have *known* Love... breathe into gratitude and awe for those signs of God's ever-present love in your life.

With each in-breath, your Love expands...with each exhale your Love flows out... May we who have light to spread come forth in the world and may our Love-light heal our world.....Feel your Love expanding out into deepest space where the hand of the creator holds each planet spinning among the stars, and feel in your deepest being your kinship with the stars...

And in this moment, in this place let us remember who we are... We are love... We are each the embodiment of Love. We are Love's hands. Love's voice. Love's eyes. Love's breath. We ARE the Love that heals the broken places in our big beautiful world, and that heals our own small worlds. We are love... and Love... and LOVE...

There is only love.

May it be so, and so it is. Amen.