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Advent: Love

December 23, 2018, James Ryan Davis

Good morning everyone.

I want to warmly welcome you and thank you all for being with us here on this lovely morning before Christmas Eve!

For those of you who may not know me, my name is Ryan Davis and I head up the senior high youth ministries here at Campbell River Baptist Church.

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Over the last few weeks, we have been looking at the advent of Jesus Christ. The word 'Advent' simply means "the arrival of a notable person or event". So, when we look at the advent of Jesus Christ we are actually looking both backward in remembrance of the birth of Jesus and we're looking forward with anticipation to the day when Jesus will come again.

We're going to start by looking at the biblical account of Jesus's birth, and so I would invite you to turn with me to Luke 2:1-7

While you're turning to the verses, I wanted to say that a fair few of the verses we'll look at today are from the Gospel of Luke. I love the Gospel of Luke! When you look at the writers of the Gospels - Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John Mark and Luke stands out to me because neither of them were direct disciples of Jesus. John Mark was the child of a

follower of Jesus and traveled with the Disciple Peter later in his life. Luke may have heard Jesus speak, but later in life he traveled around with Paul.

Luke was a Doctor, He was an intellectual, and when you read his Gospel account, you can see that he took no information for granted. He researched things and interviewed people and took the time to look at all the facts, and then record them as accurately as possible. Which makes it very interesting that Luke wrote one of the only two New Testament accounts of the birth of Jesus. It is commonly thought among bible historians that Luke would have got the details for Jesus birth directly from Mary later on in her life.

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Luke 2:1-7 (NLT)

1 At that time the Roman emperor, Augustus, decreed that a census should be taken throughout the Roman Empire. 2 (This was the first census taken when Quirinius was governor of Syria.) 3 All returned to their own ancestral towns to register for this census. 4 And because Joseph was a descendant of King David, he had to go to Bethlehem in Judea, David's ancient home. He traveled there from the village of Nazareth in Galilee.

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5 He took with him Mary, to whom he was engaged, who was now expecting a child.

6 And while they were there, the time came for her baby to be born. 7 She gave birth to her firstborn son. She wrapped him snugly in strips of cloth and laid him

in a manger because there was no lodging available for them.

This passage is very familiar to most of us. Even if you have never read it formally in scripture, most people can probably say that they have heard this story and are familiar with the nativity scene.

I think what can happen though, is we become so familiar with this tale and with the nativity scene, that when it comes to Christmas, we forget to remember or consider why Jesus was born in such a humble state. We can inadvertently leave Jesus in the manger and forget the rest of the story. Before I get too far ahead of myself though, let's explore the details that Luke gives us, because I think there are some important points to consider.

#1 point

The first point of interest I want to look at is the census that was decreed by Caesar Augustus.

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So there are a couple of interesting things going on with this decree. One is the person who was ordering the decree, and Two is the providence of the decree, or in other words, God's divine plan which is visible through this decree.

So number one:

Caesar Augustus is arguably one of the most important people in Roman history. Having taken the throne and the title of Caesar in 31BC, He ruled for almost 45 years and after his death in 14AD, he left a legacy of peace and prosperity that lasted almost two centuries. His administration was known for their public works, one of which was the system of highly developed roadways that quite literally paved the way for the spread of the Gospel years later.

And number two:

The wonderful providence of God.

The most powerful ruler on earth at that time, Caesar Augustus, thought he was demonstrating his power by decreeing this census. However, God was using Augustus to accomplish his own redemptive plan.

As one commentator describes it,

- “Caesar Augustus’ relentless arm stretched out to squeeze its tribute even in a tiny village at the far end of the Mediterranean. Thus it came about that a village carpenter and his expectant teenage bride were forced to travel to his hometown to be registered for taxation.”

Although Caesar Augustus would never know it, God was unleashing a chain of events that would turn the world upside down. Caesar Augustus was causing Joseph and Mary to travel to Bethlehem, which is where the prophet Micah said that the Savior would be born. Micah wrote,

Micah 5:2 (NLT)

***2 But you, O Bethlehem Ephrathah,
are only a small village among all the people of Judah.
Yet a ruler of Israel
whose origins are in the distant past,
will come from you on my behalf.***

What is so ironic is that God used Caesar Augustus to get Joseph and Mary to Bethlehem so that Jesus could be born there. God was providentially orchestrating the most powerful man in the world to accomplish His own divine redemptive plan.

Another commentator said it this way,

- “For Augustus, the taking of censuses was one of the ways he employed to get control over various parts of his empire. But—and here is the irony of the thing—in the process, as he thought, of tightening his grip on his huge empire, he so organized things that Jesus, Son of Mary, Son of David, Son of God, destined to sit on the throne of Israel and of the world, was born in the city of David, his royal ancestor.”

God is providentially in control of all history. He does not merely rule over the church.

He rules over all creation.

#2 point

Our second point of interest to pause at is going to be the actual birth of Jesus.

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The very fact that he was physically born is immensely important to us!

Lets quickly look at the start of the Gospel of John;

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John 1:1-5 (NLT)

1 In the beginning the Word already existed.

The Word was with God,

and the Word was God.

2 He existed in the beginning with God.

3 God created everything through him,

and nothing was created except through him.

4 The Word gave life to everything that was created,

and his life brought light to everyone.

5 The light shines in the darkness,

and the darkness can never extinguish it.

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John 1:10 (NLT)

10 He came into the very world he created, but the world didn't recognize him.

John 1:14 (NLT)

14 So the Word became human and made his home among us. He was full of unfailing love and faithfulness. And we have seen his glory, the glory of the Father's one and only Son.

The fact that Jesus, who is God, would choose to set aside all His Glorious prestige and enter the very world which He created is remarkable. But He didn't just stop there. Jesus could have chosen to come the first time in a very different way, He could have walked onto the scene in all His heavenly authority and glory, surrounded by armies of angels and everyone would have fallen to their knees in worship. But He didn't. Instead, Jesus chose to come to us in the most meager and humble way possible. The King of kings, the Lord over all creation, the Great I am, was born to a teenage mother who was far away from home and to a young uncertain carpenter in a cold, lonely place. There were no angels, no heavenly trumpets, and no voices from heaven announcing the birth of the Son of God.

So why is that so important to us?

If we think of Jesus only in His position of power and authority, then we completely miss Him in His humanity.

The birth of Jesus shows the humanity of our Savior. In very simple terms, Luke tells us that Jesus was born to a young mother in very difficult circumstances. Mary held the body of a very real human being when she held Jesus. He really was a person.

This is truly amazing. The God of the universe entered our time and space in the person of a little baby. He set aside the prestige of deity and accepted all the limitations of our human condition. He became one of us so that he could sympathize with us and, more importantly, so that he could save us. It was necessary that Jesus be fully human so that he could fully obey God on our behalf and fully offer his body as a sacrifice for our sin. And that was his plan right from the start.

The fact that Jesus Chose to be born in humility, then raised in such a way as to guard His identity until the appointed time and then to sacrifice Himself for not only His loved ones but for everyone. Strangers, enemies, and loved ones. He didn't distinguish, He died for everyone alike.

This is the single greatest example of Love that we could ever see.

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When we look at the birth of Jesus, we can see the day when hope and peace, joy and love entered the world in the form of a sweet little baby, and when we look forward to the day when Jesus will come again, we are looking forward to the day when that hope and peace, joy and love will be fully realized in our world and satisfied through the returning of Christ.

But where does that leave us today? We are stuck in the tension between what has happened and what will one day happen.

So what I would like us to do now is turn to 1 John 4:16-17

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1 John 4:16-17 (NLT)

16 We know how much God loves us, and we have put our trust in his love. God is love, and all who live in love live in God, and God lives in them. 17 And as we live in God, our love grows more perfect. So we will not be afraid on the day of judgment, but we can face Him with confidence because we live like Jesus here in this world.

Did you catch that last part?

“because we live like Jesus here in this world.”

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How do we do that? How do we, as broken people, live like Jesus - the perfect spotless offering - in our world today?

Well, if we are called to live like Jesus, then we need to look at how Jesus lived.

During His life here on earth, Jesus was the ultimate expression of Love and Mercy, of Truth and Grace. All through the Gospels, we see Jesus moving toward people in a way that showed the utmost compassion. Jesus sought out and moved towards people who were marginalized and ostracized by the society of His day.

Let's take a few minutes and look at a few interactions Jesus had with people on a day to day basis.

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Luke 5:12-13 (NLT)

12 In one of the villages, Jesus met a man with an advanced case of leprosy.

When the man saw Jesus, he bowed with his face to the ground, begging to be healed. "Lord," he said, "if you are willing, you can heal me and make me clean."

13 Jesus reached out and touched him. "I am willing," he said. "Be healed!" And instantly the leprosy disappeared.

Leprosy is a disease that affects the skin, causing bumps and discoloration and kills the nerves in your body. It often leads to people becoming increasingly deformed and scared because they can't feel when they are being hurt. Because of the open wounds and skin deterioration, leprosy is known to have a strong smell associated with the disease.

In Jesus day if someone had leprosy, they were viewed as unclean and untouchable. They were pushed out of the towns and cities, and they were thought to be the most disgusting people.

This interaction between Jesus and the leper shows the love and compassion that Jesus had for the broken and the hurting. Jesus could have chosen to stand back and heal the man at a distance (which would have been completely appropriate and the culturally acceptable thing for Him to do), but instead, Jesus got right in close, and He reached out and touched him.

That touch was more than just a handshake or a hand on the shoulder. That touch would probably have been the first meaningful connection that that man would have had in years.

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So when we “live like Jesus here in this world” as John said, we need to acknowledge the importance of connecting with the marginalized. When we go out and interact with people on a daily basis, we need to be looking at how can we connect with them in a way that will break down the walls that may have them feeling ostracized by the rest of society.

You may have heard the saying “seek first to understand, then be understood”. We need to hear peoples stories and understand the hurt, fear, and sorrow in their lives so that we can effectively speak Hope, Peace, and Love into their lives in a meaningful way.

Let's look at another account, this time we'll go to John 8:1-11

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John 8:1-11 (NLT)

Jesus returned to the Mount of Olives, 2 but early the next morning he was back again at the Temple. A crowd soon gathered, and he sat down and taught them. 3 As he was speaking, the teachers of religious law and the Pharisees brought a woman who had been caught in the act of adultery. They put her in front of the crowd.

4 "Teacher," they said to Jesus, "this woman was caught in the act of adultery. 5 The law of Moses says to stone her. What do you say?"

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6 They were trying to trap him into saying something they could use against him, but Jesus stooped down and wrote in the dust with his finger. 7 They kept demanding an answer, so he stood up again and said, "All right, but let the one who has never sinned throw the first stone!" 8 Then he stooped down again and wrote in the dust.

9 When the accusers heard this, they slipped away one by one, beginning with the oldest, until only Jesus was left in the middle of the crowd with the woman.

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10 Then Jesus stood up again and said to the woman, “Where are your accusers? Didn’t even one of them condemn you?”

11 “No, Lord,” she said.

And Jesus said, “Neither do I. Go and sin no more.”

This passage highlights another aspect of how Jesus lived, and it gives us another example of what following Him looks like as we “live like Jesus here in this world”

Jesus was the master of walking the tension between Grace and Truth. Jesus had the advantage of being Lord of creation and knowing everyone's heart, but we still need to do our part to follow in His stead.

In this account, the highly religious people of the day had found someone who was living in sin. So they drag her out and make a big deal of her specific, individual sin in front of everyone around and they call for holy justice to be served against her.

Jesus, on the other hand, takes a different tactic. Jesus does not water down her sin or ignore it, I don’t want to you to think I’m saying that; but what Jesus does rather, is He calls everyone present to recognize that sin is a global problem, it is in every single person.

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There was no one person in the crowd who had the right to punish or judge the woman because of her sin, all were equally guilty of falling short of God’s standard. Only Jesus had that right. Only Jesus could have condemned her. But notice what He does instead.

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John 8:10

10 Then Jesus stood up again and said to the woman, "Where are your accusers? Didn't even one of them condemn you?"

11 "No, Lord," she said.

And Jesus said, "Neither do I. Go and sin no more."

Jesus didn't call her out for sleeping around, He never even mentioned it.

Outside of having a close and personal relationship with someone, our job is actually to stand up for the people that we meet and see them for the inherent value they have as creations of our most high God. We need to show mercy as Jesus has shown us mercy and to let the Holy Spirit and Gods Word be the conviction needed.

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Carihi Story

I have been asked a number of times over the last few weeks if I can share this story, so as some of you know, about a month and a half ago, I was invited to speak at Carihi School in their Comparative Civilization class. I just want to say up front, that it was hands down one of the most nerve-wracking things I have done. The teacher had emailed and asked if I could come in and speak about the details of Jesus's life, the historical context of His time, the nature of His teachings and what made people respond to Him. - easy stuff! right?

The teacher then went on in our emails back and forth and explained that she needed me to be someone who was not looking to promote Christianity, but rather, for me to be someone who would help the students explore their own thoughts and feelings about Jesus. She told me I wasn't allowed to preach. That was where it got a little harder for me. I mean how do you go into a conversation with unbelievers about who Jesus is and what He said about Himself without preaching. Finally, a few days before I was supposed to go in, the teacher followed up with a list of questions that her students had put together for me. These were things that the students thought were worth discussing, these were the topics that the students were wrestling with.

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- Why did the rulers of the Middle Ages use Christianity as a reason to cause war?

- Why did the intentions of the Crusades contradict Jesus' teachings about peace and love?

- If everyone is equal, how did Christians justify owning slaves?

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- Where does 'no sex before marriage' come from?

- What does Christianity teach about monogamy versus polygamy?

- Where did the idea that homosexuality is taboo come from considering the ancient Greeks were okay with it?

I'm not going to actually get into answering these questions here, because that would take way to long. I'm just sharing this list of questions to give you an idea of the things that these teenagers were wrestling with.

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Now, if I wasn't nervous enough initially, then when I got these questions and I started to dig in to try and figure out how I am I going to address these without preaching, I was freaking out a bit.

I primarily talk to kids and teens, but I am used to approaching these types of subjects from a "preaching" mentality. If I was going to speak on any given topic at youth group, I can usually format it into a sermon. However, at Carihi I was asked specifically not to 'preach', but to have an open discussion. To help draw out the kids real thoughts and feelings on each topic.

Ultimately, I was being asked to be all info and no heart. All love and peace, without the truth of the reality of sin.

I remember the day finally came when it was time to go into the class and speak. I got up bright and early, headed over to Carihi and met the teacher, and she leads me down to the classroom, and I was actually doing ok. I was telling myself to stay calm and that everything's going to be fine, and for the first few minutes, I actually believed it. Then

the bell rang, the last few students rolled in and the teacher got up to shut the door, and as I watched the door close, I remember feeling like it was the lid of a coffin closing...

I am not a claustrophobic person. I have never suffered from feeling like I couldn't breathe because the walls were closing in on me, but in that classroom, as the door closed, it took everything I had not to turn tail and run. I started sweating bullets and my breathing got all shaky... It was the wildest thing!

But you know what, It went amazing! I ended up sharing some of the basics of Jesus life story, who He was and where He came from. We talked about what Jesus said about Himself and what others had to say about Him after he died. We looked at some Old Testament prophecies that came true throughout His life, and I had some non-biblical writing and evidence that supports Jesus' physical death and Resurrection. We ended the class by talking about some of the questions that had been presented to me prior to the class, and we got through most of them but thankfully time ran out and the bell rang before we could get to the discussion around how Christians respond to homosexuality. Or at least I was thankful that we hadn't had time...

So I said farewell to the teacher and I thought I had dodged a bullet and was done and I breathed a sigh of relief.

Then the teacher emailed me again. Turns out the kids had really enjoyed the discussion and they asked if I could come back in for part of another class. What was

supposed to be a short discussion, ended up taking the whole 90 minutes and it almost entirely focused on hows Christians respond to homosexuality.

One of the things that I noticed right away, was that most kids were in some form of a defensive stance right from the get-go. They asked me my opinion as a Christian, and then right away put their guards up. They were expecting me to rain down hell-fire and brimstone and to start talking about eternal torment in Hell.

After a few minutes of discussion, I started to see that the whole class thought that all Christians hated all homosexual people, and it went farther than that still when I realized that the class thought that Christians essentially hated all people on the fringes of society. They thought Christians hated everyone who did not believe in Jesus.

I wasn't raised in a Christian home, and so once upon a time, I had similar views to these kids. I remember Christians being portrayed in movies and other media as being self-righteous, picket sign waving, judgemental people.

The whole class agreed that when they looked at Jesus' life and teachings, He didn't teach hate. He taught Love, Mercy, Grace, and Peace. But the fact that Christians historically seem to readily persecute people still remained. I decided to share a story with the class about my own personal journey of learning how to love people and I tried to point out that its not a Christian-only challenge when it comes to understanding

people of different opinions. So I told them this story and I will just say that I am not proud of how I used to act:

See, when I was in High school, I was highly homophobic. I was not a very nice person most of the time, and there was one person in particular who was gay that I used to bully on a regular basis. I ended up getting reprimanded by the school on several occasions for bullying this guy.

When I was 20, I had graduated and moved and I gave my life to the Lord, and one of the first jobs I got after giving my heart to Christ, was working in a respite group home for kids that were coming out of Manitoba Youth Corrections. One of the first kids under my care was a young individual who was born a male and had chosen to live their life as a female and was in a open gay relationship. At that point, I was still struggling with being very homophobic. But then there was this young person who was now in my care, and it was my duty to take care of them, to pick them up and drop them off every day at school and work, to make sure they ate dinner and did there homework, to get them to bed on time and up for school each day. All the while I was learning how to walk closer with Jesus and I was reading in my bible verses like:

[25]

Romans 5:8 (NLT)

8 But God showed his great love for us by sending Christ to die for us while we were still sinners.

I had just come to understand my own sin and how it had been separating me from Jesus, and how Jesus still chose to pay the price for my freedom.

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Matthew 7:1-2

“Do not judge others, and you will not be judged. 2 For you will be treated as you treat others. The standard you use in judging is the standard by which you will be judged.

The struggles and sins that I was still wrestling with every day were no better or worse than this young individual I was caring for. The name of the sin was not the important part, and I was not my job to point out their individual sins.

[27]

Matthew 22:37 - 39

‘love the LORD your God with all your heart, all your soul, and all your mind.’ 38 This is the first and greatest commandment. 39 A second is equally important: ‘Love your neighbor as yourself.’

I had come face to face with a turning point in my life. I had to decide if I was going to let my own personal prejudice and lack of love get in the way of what Jesus was trying to teach me and show me and call me to.

My job was not to judge this young individual, and my job was not to point out everything they were doing wrong in their life. My job, through the power and grace of

Jesus Christ, was to Love God and Love them. No matter the cost, and no matter the outcome. It was not my job to save them, but when the opportunities came up, Then I shared the hope I had found in Jesus, not the condemnation found in their sin.

I don't want anyone to think that I have all the answers in this area because I really don't. Unfortunately, I didn't do super well at loving that young person all the time, but I did come away from that experience with a deeper understanding of what God was calling those who follow Him to do, to Love and 'live like Jesus here in this world". To Love those that are ostracized and viewed as less than in our society. To speak the truth of the Gospel in humility and grace.

Remember that the Gospel is simply the Good News about Jesus, and today as we consider the Advent of Love let's remember that Jesus is LOVE and that He loved us first.

When I was discussing this sermon with Pastor Adrian this week, he shared this little line with me, and I'm gonna snag it and end with it because I think it sums up everything really well.

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We don't save people, God does.

Our Job is to Listen, to learn, to love, and then share Jesus.

Let's Pray...

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Benediction

Ephesians 3:16-21 (NLT)

16 I pray that from his glorious, unlimited resources he will empower you with inner strength through his Spirit. 17 Then Christ will make his home in your hearts as you trust in him. Your roots will grow down into God's love and keep you strong. 18 And may you have the power to understand, as all God's people should, how wide, how long, how high, and how deep his love is. 19 May you experience the love of Christ, though it is too great to understand fully. Then you will be made complete with all the fullness of life and power that comes from God.

20 Now all glory to God, who is able, through his mighty power at work within us, to accomplish infinitely more than we might ask or think. 21 Glory to him in the church and in Christ Jesus through all generations forever and ever! Amen.